A DICKENS DRAMATIC READER

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SCENES FROM PICKWICK
SCENES FROM NICHOLAS NICKLEBY
THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH
A CHRISTMAS CAROL

BY

FANNY COMSTOCK

FORMERLY OF BRIDGEWATER NORMAL SCHOOL. AUTHOR OF "A DRAMATIC VERSION OF GREEK MYTHS AND HERO TALES"

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PREFACE

This book is appropriate for use in all classes in which the works of Dickens are studied. Explanations and stage directions are given, to make the scenes intelligible without the context and for convenience in acting. When the selections are read at sight, explanations can be assigned to a single pupil, or, if the story is familiar, they can be omitted.

The aim has been to follow the original closely, and with few exceptions the characters speak the language Dickens gave them. The dramatic arrangement should not be a substitute for the full narrative but rather an introduction to it, in which the imagination is aided by the coöperation of the class, through the voice and action. It is hoped that such an introduction will so vividly present the world of light-hearted gayety, of sympathy for distress, of love for humanity which Dickens created, that more will linger there gladly with only the master for guide.

FANNY COMSTOCK

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SCENES FROM PICKWICK

MR. PICKWICK AT DINGLEY DELL

CHARACTERS

Mr. Pickwick	Sam Weller
Mr. Tupman	Mr. Perker
Mr. Winkle	Miss Rachel Wardle
Mr. Snodgrass	Mrs. Wardle
Mr. Wardle	Isabella Wardle
Alfred Jingle	Emily Wardle

Surgeon, Fat Boy, Servants, Landlady, Chambermaid, Maids

Mr. Pickwick is an elderly English gentleman living in London, simple and unsuspecting in mind, and kindly of heart. Benevolence seems expressed in his very spectacles, and in the black gaiters which he habitually wears.

His taste for travel is shared by his friends, Mr. Tracy Tupman, Mr. Nathaniel Winkle, and Mr. Augustus Snodgrass, who accompany him on many pleasant journeys. Mr. Tupman, though nearly as old and stout as Mr. Pickwick, is noted for his gallantry and susceptible nature and is inclined to foppishness in dress. Mr. Winkle desires to be thought a sportsman, though he can furnish no good reason for such an opinion. Mr. Snodgrass has a poetical bent; he is mild and inoffensive. All four of the gentlemen are rather less accustomed to the realities of life and more helpless than one would expect them to be.

At a field review in Rochester Mr. Pickwick and his friends make the acquaintance of Mr. Wardle, an impulsive, warm-hearted country gentleman, ruddy-faced and portly, given to wearing blue coats with bright buttons. Mr. Wardle invites the Pickwickians with the greatest cordiality to his home at Dingley Dell. They accept the invitation and, reaching Manor Farm late one afternoon, receive a hospitable welcome.

Miss Rachel Wardle, sister of Mr. Wardle, is a romantic lady of uncertain age, thin and faded, but fond of youthful fashions. Her manner is mincing and affected. Isabella and Emily Wardle, the pretty daughters, are becomingly dressed in gowns of an earlier day.

SCENE I

The parlor at Manor Farm on the morning after the arrival of Mr. Pickwick and his friends. Miss Wardle, Isabella Wardle, and Emily Wardle are awaiting the return of the gentlemen, who have gone out shooting.

MISS WARDLE

Bella, look out and see if the gentlemen are coming. I 'm sure it 's time for them.

ISABELLA WARDLE

[*Laying down her embroidery and rising*] They 've been out a long time.

EMILY WARDLE

They 've stopped shooting. Not a gun has been fired for five minutes.

MISS WARDLE

That means they are coming in soon, Emily.

[*She smooths her cuffs, sets her collar straight, and pats her hair.*

ISABELLA WARDLE

[*At the door, looking out*] Why, what *is* the matter with the little old gentleman? He 's as pale as a ghost, and they 're leading him.

MISS WARDLE

Do you mean Mr. Pickwick? I hope nothing has happened to him.

ISABELLA WARDLE

No, Aunt Rachel, it 's the other one, his friend, Mr. Tupman.

[*Miss Wardle wrings her hands and flutters about distractedly.*

MR. WARDLE

[*Outside*] Don't be frightened.

MR. TUPMAN *enters, supported and surrounded by* WARDLE, PICKWICK, WINKLE, *and* SNODGRASS. *His arm is bandaged with pocket handkerchiefs.*

ISABELLA WARDLE

What 's the matter?

EMILY WARDLE

What *is* the matter?

MR. WARDLE

The charge of Winkle's gun went in the wrong direction, that 's all.

MISS WARDLE

[*Screaming hysterically*] Oh! oh!

[*She falls into the arms of her nieces.*

MR. WARDLE

Throw some cold water over her.

MISS WARDLE

No, no — I am better now. Bella, Emily — a surgeon! Is he wounded? Is he dead? Is he — [*Screaming again.*

MR. TUPMAN

Calm yourself. Dear, dear madam, calm yourself.

MISS WARDLE

[*Aside*] It is his voice. [*Wiping her eyes.*

MR. TUPMAN

Do not agitate yourself, I entreat you, dearest madam. I am very little hurt, I assure you.

MISS WARDLE

Then you are not dead! Oh, say you are not dead!

MR. WARDLE

Don't be a fool, Rachel! What in creation is the use of his *saying* he is n't dead?

MR. TUPMAN

[*To Miss Wardle*] No, no, I am not. I require no assistance but yours. Let me lean on your arm. [*In a whisper*] Oh, Miss Rachel!

[*Miss Wardle leads him to the sofa. He sinks back.*

MISS WARDLE

Are you faint?

MR. TUPMAN

No. It is nothing. I shall be better presently.

[*He closes his eyes. The others talk together near the door. Mr. Wardle goes out.*

MISS WARDLE

He sleeps! Dear — dear — Mr. Tupman!

MR. TUPMAN

[*Jumping up*] Oh, say those words again!

MISS WARDLE

[*Bashfully*] Surely you did not hear them!

MR. TUPMAN

Oh yes, I did! Repeat them. If you would have me recover, repeat them.

MR. WARDLE *appears at the door.*

MISS WARDLE

Hush! My brother!

MR. WARDLE *enters with a* Surgeon, *who examines the wounded arm. The men stand silent about* MR. TUPMAN *for a moment.*

MR. WARDLE

Nothing very serious, I hope.

SURGEON

Nothing serious.

MR. WARDLE

Will the gentleman be all right in a few days?

SURGEON

In a very few days, I think.

MR. WARDLE

[*Cheerily*] Glad to hear it, I 'm sure.

MR. PICKWICK

[*Gloomily*] And *I* am very glad to hear it.

[*Looking severely at Mr. Winkle.*

MR. WARDLE

I 'm sure we 're all glad. Are you a cricketer, Mr. Winkle?

MR. WINKLE

No.

MR. SNODGRASS

Are you, Mr. Wardle?

MR. WARDLE

I was, Mr. Snodgrass, once upon a time, but I 've given it up now. I subscribe to the club here, but I don't play.

MR. PICKWICK

The grand match is played to-day, I believe.

MR. WARDLE

It is. Of course you would like to see it.

MR. PICKWICK

I, sir, am delighted to view any sports which may be safely indulged in, and in which the impotent efforts of unskillful people do not endanger human life. [*Speaks these words severely, looking fixedly at Mr. Winkle for some time after he stops speaking. Mr. Winkle cowers beneath the look.*] Shall we be justified in leaving our wounded friend to the care of the ladies?

MR. TUPMAN

You cannot leave me in better hands.

MR. SNODGRASS

Quite impossible.

MR. WARDLE

Then Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass shall go with me to the cricket match. There 'll be some good play.

MR. PICKWICK

I will accompany you with the greatest pleasure, sir.

MR. SNODGRASS

With all the pleasure in life, sir.

MR. WINKLE

Most happy, I 'm sure.

[*During this conversation the Surgeon has been bandaging Mr. Tupman's arm and putting it in a sling.*

SURGEON

Better keep quiet for a day or two, sir.

MR. TUPMAN

I will.

SURGEON

I 'll look in again.

MR. WARDLE

Oh, yes, look in again, surely. [*The Surgeon goes out.*

MR. PICKWICK

[*To Mr. Tupman*] I regret that you cannot accompany us.

MR. WINKLE

[*Nervously*] I regret it very deeply.

MR. WARDLE

We leave him in good hands. Come! time we were off!

MR. TUPMAN

Have no fear for me, I shall have the best of care.

[*Mr. Wardle, Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass go out, followed by Isabella and Emily Wardle.*

MISS WARDLE

I have forgotten my flowers.

MR. TUPMAN

Water them now.

MISS WARDLE

You will take cold.

MR. TUPMAN

No, no — it will do me good. Let me accompany you.

[*Miss Wardle adjusts the sling and leads Mr. Tupman out.*

SCENE II

The arbor. MR. TUPMAN and MISS WARDLE enter. She takes a large watering pot from the corner and turns to go. MR. TUPMAN draws her to a seat beside him.

MR. TUPMAN

Miss Wardle! [*Miss Wardle trembles violently; some pebbles in the watering pot shake noisily.*] Miss Wardle, you are an angel.

MISS WARDLE

Mr. Tupman!

MR. TUPMAN

Nay, I know it but too well.

MISS WARDLE

All women are angels, they say.

MR. TUPMAN

Then what can *you* be, or to what, without presumption, can I compare you? Where was the woman ever seen who resembled you? Where else could I hope to find so rare a combination of excellence and beauty? Where else could I seek to — Oh!

[*He presses the hand which holds the watering pot.*

MISS WARDLE

[*Turning her head aside*] Men are such deceivers!

MR. TUPMAN

They are, they are, but not all men. There lives at least one being who can never change — one being who would be content to devote his whole existence to your happiness — who lives but in your eyes — who breathes but in your smiles — who bears the heavy burden of life itself only for you.

MISS WARDLE

Could such an individual be found —

MR. TUPMAN

But he *can* be found. He *is* found. He is here, Miss Wardle. [*He kneels.*

MISS WARDLE

Mr. Tupman, rise.

MR. TUPMAN

Never! Oh, Rachel! [*Kisses her hand. The watering pot falls to the ground.*] Oh, Rachel! say you love me.

The FAT BOY *comes to the door, unobserved.*

MISS WARDLE

[*Turning her head aside*] Mr. Tupman — I can hardly speak the words, but — but — you are not wholly indifferent to me. [*Looking toward the door and starting violently*] Mr. Tupman, we are observed! We are discovered!

[*Mr. Tupman looks round. The Fat Boy is seen standing motionless at the door, staring in with large round eyes, with a face wholly devoid of expression. He and Mr. Tupman stare at each other silently several seconds.*

MR. TUPMAN

What do you want here, sir?

FAT BOY

Dinner 's ready, sir.

MR. TUPMAN

Have you just come here, sir?

FAT BOY

Just.

[*Mr. Tupman looks at him long and searchingly, but he does not flinch.*

MR. TUPMAN

[*In a whisper, as he takes Miss Wardle's arm*] He knows nothing of what has happened.

MISS WARDLE

Nothing.

[*An imperfectly suppressed chuckle is heard. Mr. Tupman looks sharply at the Fat Boy, who remains immovable.*

MR. TUPMAN

He must have been fast asleep.

MISS WARDLE

I have not the least doubt of it. [*They leave the arbor.*

SCENE III

The arbor. MRS. WARDLE (MR. WARDLE'S mother) enters, wearing bonnet and shawl, walking with a cane, and leaning on the FAT BOY'S shoulder. She sits down. The FAT BOY leaves the arbor, but soon returns stealthily with an air of great mystery and comes close to her, frightening her exceedingly. He shouts his remarks in her ear. MR. JINGLE is a strolling actor, who met MR. WARDLE at the cricket match and has come to Manor Farm at his invitation.

FAT BOY

Missus!

MR. JINGLE'S *head appears at the door. He listens unobserved.*

MRS. WARDLE

[*Trembling violently*] Well, Joe, I 'm sure I 've been a good mistress to you, Joe. You have invariably been treated very kindly. You have never had too much to do, and you have always had enough to eat.

FAT BOY

I knows I has.

MRS. WARDLE

Then what can you want to do now?

FAT BOY

I wants to make your flesh creep. What do you think I see in this very arbor last night?

MRS. WARDLE

Bless us! What?

FAT BOY

The strange gentleman—him as had his arm hurt—and—

MRS. WARDLE

Who was with him, Joe? Who was it? None of the servants, I hope.

FAT BOY

Worser than that.

MRS. WARDLE

Not one of my grandda'aters?

FAT BOY

Worser than that.

MRS. WARDLE

Worse than *that*, Joe! Who was it, Joe? I insist upon knowing. [*Jingle disappears from the doorway.*

FAT BOY

[*Looking round cautiously*] Miss Rachel.

MRS. WARDLE

[*In a shrill tone*] What! Speak louder.

FAT BOY

[*Roaring*] Miss Rachel.

MRS. WARDLE

My da'ater? [*The Fat Boy nods a great many times.*] What were they doing?

FAT BOY

He was making love to her.

MRS. WARDLE

What!

FAT BOY

Making love to her, reg'lar.

MRS. WARDLE

And she suffered him to!

FAT BOY

[*Grinning*] She seemed to like it.

MRS. WARDLE

Are you sure you have n't made a mistake? Are you sure it was Miss Rachel?

FAT BOY

Nobody could mistake anybody else for Miss Rachel. There 's nobody else like her.

MRS. WARDLE

Without my permission!

FAT BOY

I thought you would n't like it.

MRS. WARDLE

At her time of life! She ought to know better.

FAT BOY

Yes, missus.

MRS. WARDLE

I 'm a miserable old woman. She might have waited till I was dead!

FAT BOY

Yes, missus.

MRS. WARDLE

Hold your tongue, Joe, and help me back to the house. Dear, dear! Who would have thought it!

[*She shakes her head and mumbles to herself as they go out together slowly.*

SCENE IV

The breakfast parlor. MR. JINGLE peeps in at the door and finds MISS WARDLE with her knitting. He coughs; she looks up and smiles, and he enters. He is very thin, and his clothes, though originally smart, are patched and threadbare. In spite of his haggard, shabby appearance, he has a self-possessed, jaunty air.

MR. JINGLE

Miss Wardle, forgive intrusion — short acquaintance — no time for ceremony — all discovered.

MISS WARDLE

Sir!

MR. JINGLE

Hush! — large boy — dumpling face — round eyes — rascal! [*He shakes his head.*

MISS WARDLE

I presume you allude to Joseph, sir.

MR. JINGLE

Yes, ma'am — treacherous dog, Joe — told the old lady — old lady furious — wild — raving — arbor — Tupman — making love — all that sort of thing — eh, ma'am — eh?

MISS WARDLE

Mr. Jingle, if you come here to insult me —

MR. JINGLE

Not at all — by no means — overheard the tale — came to warn you of your danger — tender my services — prevent the hubbub. Never mind — think it an insult — leave the room —

[*He turns to go.*

MISS WARDLE

[*Bursting into tears*] What *shall* I do? My brother will be furious.

MR. JINGLE

Say he dreamt it — nothing more easy — blackguard boy — lovely woman — Fat Boy horsewhipped — you believed — end of the matter — all comfortable.

[*He sits down near Miss Wardle. Miss Wardle gives Mr. Jingle a grateful look. He sighs and looks fixedly at her, then suddenly averts his gaze.*

MISS WARDLE

You seem unhappy, Mr. Jingle. May I show my gratitude for your kind interference by inquiring into the cause, with a view, if possible, to its removal?

MR. JINGLE

Ha! Removal! Remove *my* unhappiness, and your love bestowed upon a man who is insensible to the blessing —

who even now contemplates a design upon the affections of the niece of the creature who — but no; he is my friend; I will not expose his vices. Miss Wardle — farewell!

[*At the conclusion of this address Mr. Jingle wipes his eyes with a very small handkerchief and goes toward the door.*

MISS WARDLE

Stay, Mr. Jingle! You have made an allusion to Mr. Tupman — explain it.

MR. JINGLE

Never! never!

[*He sits down again beside Miss Wardle.*

MISS WARDLE

Mr. Jingle, I entreat, I implore you, if there is any dreadful mystery connected with Mr. Tupman, reveal it.

MR. JINGLE

Can I, can I see — lovely creature — sacrificed at the shrine — heartless avarice! Tupman only wants your money.

MISS WARDLE

The wretch!

MR. JINGLE

More than that — loves another.

MISS WARDLE

Another! Who is it?

MR. JINGLE

Short girl — black eyes — niece Emily.

MISS WARDLE

[*Angrily*] It can't be. I won't believe it.

MR. JINGLE

Watch him.

MISS WARDLE

I will.

MR. JINGLE

Watch his looks.

MISS WARDLE

I will.

MR. JINGLE

His whispers.

MISS WARDLE

I will.

MR. JINGLE

He 'll sit next her at table.

MISS WARDLE

Let him.

MR. JINGLE

He 'll flatter her.

MISS WARDLE

Let him.

MR. JINGLE

He 'll pay her every possible attention.

MISS WARDLE

Let him.

MR. JINGLE

And he 'll cut you.

MISS WARDLE

[*Screaming with rage*] Cut *me!* *He* cut *me* — *will* he!

MR. JINGLE

You will convince yourself?

MISS WARDLE

I will.

MR. JINGLE

You 'll show your spirit?

MISS WARDLE

I will.

MR. JINGLE

You 'll not have him afterwards?

MISS WARDLE

Never.

MR. JINGLE

You 'll take somebody else?

MISS WARDLE

Yes.

MR. JINGLE

[*Kneeling*] You shall.

SCENE V

The garden. MR. TUPMAN and MR. JINGLE are walking together.

MR. TUPMAN

You observed I followed your instructions at dinner, neglecting the aunt and paying attention to the niece. How did I do it?

MR. JINGLE

Splendid — capital — could n't act better myself — you must repeat the part to-morrow — every evening, till further notice.

MR. TUPMAN

I suppose you know best. It 's a little hard to go directly against my real feeling.

MR. JINGLE

Certainly — we understand that.

MR. TUPMAN

Does Rachel still wish it?

MR. JINGLE

She commands it.

MR. TUPMAN

You are sure?

MR. JINGLE

Of course — she does n't like it — but must be done — avert suspicion — afraid of her brother — says there 's no help for it — only a few days more — when old folks blinded — crown your happiness.

MR. TUPMAN

Dear Rachel! I do believe she 's fond of me.

MR. JINGLE

Not a doubt of it.

MR. TUPMAN

Any message?

MR. JINGLE

Love — best love — kindest regards — unalterable affection. Can I say anything for you?

MR. TUPMAN

[*Grasping Mr. Jingle's hand*] My dear fellow, carry my best love — say how hard I find it to dissemble — say anything

that 's kind; but add how sensible I am of the necessity of the suggestion she made to me, through you, this morning. Say I applaud her wisdom and admire her discretion.

MR. JINGLE

I will. Anything more?

MR. TUPMAN

Nothing; only add how ardently I long for the time when I may call her mine, and all dissimulation may be unnecessary.

MR. JINGLE

Certainly, certainly. Anything more?

MR. TUPMAN

Oh, my friend! [*Grasps Jingle's hand again*] Receive my warmest thanks for your disinterested kindness, and forgive me if I have ever, even in thought, done you the injustice of supposing that you *could* stand in my way. My dear friend, can I ever repay you?

MR. JINGLE

Don't talk of it. [*Stops a moment, as if suddenly recollecting something*] By the bye — can't spare ten pounds, can you? — very particular purpose — pay you in three days.

MR. TUPMAN

I dare say I can. Three days, you say?

MR. JINGLE

Only three days — all over then — no more difficulties. [*Mr. Tupman counts the money into his hand.*] Be careful, — not a look.

MR. TUPMAN

Not a wink.

MR. JINGLE

Not a syllable.

MR. TUPMAN

Not a whisper.

MR. JINGLE

All your attentions to the niece — rather rude than otherwise to the aunt — only way of deceiving the old ones.

MR. TUPMAN

I 'll take care.

MR. JINGLE

[*In a whisper, aside*] And *I'll* take care.

[*They go to the house.*

SCENE VI

The dining room. The table is laid. MR. PICKWICK, MR. TUPMAN, MR. WINKLE, MR. SNODGRASS, MR. WARDLE, MRS. WARDLE, ISABELLA, and EMILY are assembled for supper, but have not yet taken seats at the table.

MR. WARDLE

Where 's Rachel?

MR. PICKWICK

Aye, and Jingle?

MR. WARDLE

Dear me! I wonder I have n't missed him before. Why, I don't think I 've heard his voice for two hours at least. Emily, my dear, ring the bell. [*Emily rings the bell, and the* FAT BOY *appears.*] Where 's Miss Rachel?

FAT BOY

I can't say, sir.

MR. WARDLE

Where 's Mr. Jingle, then?

FAT BOY

I don't know.

[*He goes out. General surprise is manifested. Mr. Tupman, however, looks particularly cheerful and unconcerned.*

MR. WARDLE

That 's strange. [*Looks at his watch*] It is past eleven o'clock. [*Pause.*] Never mind, they 'll turn up presently, I dare say. I never wait supper for anybody.

[*He goes toward the table.*

MR. PICKWICK

Excellent rule, that, admirable.

MR. WARDLE

Pray sit down.

MR. PICKWICK

Certainly.

[*All sit down. Mr. Wardle helps Mr. Pickwick generously to cold beef, but suddenly a noise of many voices is heard. Mr. Wardle lays down the carving knife. Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Wardle look at each other. Heavy steps are heard outside. A* Man *rushes in, followed by the* Fat Boy *and all the* Servants.

MR. WARDLE

I should like to know what this means.

MRS. WARDLE

The kitchen chimney is n't afire, is it?

ISABELLA WARDLE

[*Screaming*] No, no, grandma.

EMILY WARDLE

[*Screaming*] No, grandma.

MR. WARDLE

[*Roaring*] What 's the matter?

MAN

[*Gasping for breath*] They 're gone, Mus'r! gone right clean off, sir!

[*Mr. Tupman, who has kept a cheerful face up to this time, lays down his knife and fork with a startled look.*

MR. WARDLE

Who 's gone? [*Fiercely.*

MAN

Mus'r Jingle and Miss Rachel, in a po-chay, from Blue Lion, Muggleton. I was there, but I could n't stop 'em; so I run off to tell 'ee. [*Mrs. Wardle quietly faints away.*

MR. TUPMAN

[*Jumping up frantically*] I paid his expenses! He has ten pounds of mine! — stop him! — he 's swindled me! — I won't have it! — I 'll have justice, Pickwick! — I won't stand it!

[*Rushes about the room in a transport of frenzy.*

MR. PICKWICK

Heaven preserve us! He 's gone mad! What shall we do?

MR. WARDLE

Do! Put the horse in the gig! I 'll get a chaise at the Lion, and follow 'em instantly. [*The Man hastens out.*] Where 's that villain Joe?

FAT BOY

Here I am, but I 'm not a willin!

MR. WARDLE

Let me get at him, Pickwick! [*Rushes at the Fat Boy. Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Winkle hold Wardle.*] He was bribed by that scoundrel, Jingle, to put me on a wrong scent, by telling me a cock-and-bull story of my sister and your friend Tupman! [*Mr. Tupman sinks into a chair.*] Let me get at him!

ISABELLA WARDLE

Oh! don't let him!

EMILY WARDLE

Pray don't let him!

WOMEN

[*Screaming*] Don't let him! [*The Fat Boy cries audibly.*

MR. WARDLE

I won't be held! Mr. Winkle, take your hands off! Mr. Pickwick, let me go, sir!

[*Mr. Pickwick has clasped his arms firmly round Mr. Wardle, who struggles violently. The Fat Boy is cuffed and shaken and pulled by the women, and pushed from the room. Mr. Pickwick releases his hold. A* Man *enters.*

MAN

Gig 's ready, sir.

ISABELLA WARDLE

Don't let him go alone!

EMILY WARDLE

He 'll kill somebody! Don't let him go alone!

MR. PICKWICK

I 'll go with him.

MR. WARDLE

[*Grasping Mr. Pickwick's hand*] You 're a good fellow, Pickwick. Emma, give Mr. Pickwick a shawl to tie round his neck — make haste. Look after your grandmother, girls, she 's fainted away. Now then, are you ready? [*While wraps of all sorts are brought for the travelers, Isabella Wardle and Emily Wardle attend to Mrs. Wardle, giving her smelling salts and cold water.*] Come, Pickwick! [*Wardle and Pickwick go out.*

SCENE VII

The yard of the White Hart in London. SAM WELLER is busily cleaning boots. He wears a striped waistcoat, black calico sleeves, drab trousers and leggings. A bright red handkerchief is tied round his neck, and he wears an old white hat much on one side. Before him are two rows of boots, one clean, the other dirty. At every addition made to the clean row, he stops and surveys his work admiringly.

A Chambermaid *enters.*

CHAMBERMAID

Sam!

SAM WELLER

Hallo!

CHAMBERMAID

Number twenty-two wants his boots.

SAM WELLER

Ask number twenty-two wether he 'll have 'em now, or wait till he gets 'em.

CHAMBERMAID

[*Coaxingly*] Come, don't be a fool, Sam.

SAM WELLER

Well, you *are* a nice young 'ooman for a musical party, you are. Look at these boots — eleven pair o' boots; and one shoe as b'longs to number six with the wooden leg. The eleven boots is to be called at half-past eight, and the shoe at nine. Who 's number twenty-two that 's to put all the others out? No, no; reg'lar rotation 's my motto. Sorry to keep you waitin', sir, but I 'll attend to you directly.

[*Resumes work on the pair of boots which he had previously begun. A loud ring is heard.* Landlady *comes bustling in.*

LANDLADY

Sam! Where 's that lazy, idle — why, Sam! — oh, there you are! Why don't you answer?

SAM WELLER

[*Gruffly*] Would n't be gen-teel to answer till you 'd done talking.

LANDLADY

Here, clean these shoes for number seventeen directly, and take 'em to private sitting room, number five, first floor.

[*Throws the shoes down and bustles away.*

SAM WELLER

[*Taking a piece of chalk from his pocket and marking the number on the soles*] Lady's shoes and private sittin' room! I suppose *she* did n't come in the waggin.

CHAMBERMAID

She came in early this morning, with a gentleman in a hackney coach, and he 's the one that wants the boots, and you 'd better do 'em; that 's all there is about it.

SAM WELLER

[*Indignantly*] Vy did n't you say so before?

[*Picks out the boots from the pile and goes to work in earnest.*

CHAMBERMAID

[*Coquettishly*] How was I to know you needed to be told? You 've got eyes in your head and ears too, I hope.

SAM WELLER

Easy, my dear, easy — as the horse said to his master when he whipped him.

CHAMBERMAID

Mind you get 'em done quick, for the gentleman 's in a tearing hurry. [*Walks smartly away.*

SAM WELLER

Don't you worry about that the least little mite. For all I know'd, he vas one o' the regular three-pennies. Private room! and a lady too! If he 's anything of a gen'lm'n, he 's worth a shillin' a day, let alone the arrands.

[*Polishes the boots and shoes busily, holds them up admiringly, and takes them away.*

SCENE VIII

A private sitting room at the White Hart, in which MR. JINGLE and MISS WARDLE are seated at breakfast. A knock is heard.

MR. JINGLE

Come in.

SAM *enters with a low bow, deposits the boots right and left at the gentleman's feet, the shoes right and left at the lady's, and backs toward the door.*

Boots.

SAM WELLER

Sir, — [*Closes the door, keeping his hand on the knob.*

MR. JINGLE

Do you know — what 's-a-name — Doctors' Commons?

SAM WELLER

Yes, sir.

MR. JINGLE

Where is it?

SAM WELLER

Paul's churchyard, sir; low archway on the carriage side, bookseller's at one corner, hot-el on the other, and two porters in the middle as touts for licenses.

MR. JINGLE

Touts for licenses!

SAM WELLER

Touts for licenses. Two coves in white aprons — touches their hats wen you walk in — "License, sir, license?" Queer sort, them, and their mas'rs too, sir — Old Bailey Proctors — and no mistake.

MR. JINGLE

What do they do?

SAM WELLER

Do! *You*, sir! That ain't the wost on it, neither. They puts things into old gen'lm'n's heads as they never dreamed of. My father, sir, wos a coachman. A widower he wos, and fat enough for anything — uncommon fat, to be sure. His missus dies, and leaves him four hundred pound. Down he goes to the Commons to see the lawyer and draw the blunt — werry smart — top-boots on — nosegay in his buttonhole — broad-brimmed tile, green shawl — quite the gen'lm'n. Goes through the archvay, thinking how he should inwest the money — up comes the touter, touches his hat — "License, sir, license?" — "What 's that?" says my father. — "Marriage license," says the touter. — "Well!" says my father, "I never thought o' that." — "I thinks you wants one, sir," says the touter. My father pulls up and thinks a bit. — "No," says he, "I 'm too old, b'sides, I 'm a many sizes too large," says he. — "Not a bit on it, sir," says the touter. — "Think not?" says my father. — "I 'm sure not," says he; "we married a gen'lm'n twice your size, last Monday." — "Did you, though?" says my father. — "To be sure we did," says the touter; "you 're a babby to him — this way, sir — this way!" — and sure enough my father walks arter

him, like a tame monkey behind a horgan, into a little back office, vere a feller sat among dirty papers and tin boxes, making believe he was busy. — "Pray take a seat, vile I makes out the affidavit, sir," says the lawyer. — "Thank 'ee, sir," says my father, and down he sat. — "What 's your name, sir?" says the lawyer. — "Tony Weller," says my father. — "Parish?" says the lawyer. — "Belle Savage," says my father; for he stopped there wen he drove up, and he know'd nothing about parishes, *he* did n't. — "And what 's the lady's name?" says the lawyer. My father was struck all of a heap. — "Blessed if I know," says he. — "Not know!" says the lawyer. — "No more nor you do," says my father; "can't I put that in arterwards?" — "Impossible!" says the lawyer. — "Werry well," says my father, after he 'd thought a moment, "put down Mrs. Clarke." — "What Clarke?" says the lawyer, dipping his pen in the ink. — "Susan Clarke, Markis o' Granby, Dorking," says my father; "she 'll have me, if I ask, I des-say — I never said nothing to her, but she 'll have me, I know." The license was made out, and she *did* have him, and what 's more, she 's got him now; and *I* never had any of the four hundred pound, worse luck. Beg your pardon, sir, but wen I gets on this here grievance, I runs on like a new barrow with the wheel greased.

[*After a moment's pause to see whether he is needed longer, he leaves the room.*

MR. JINGLE

Half-past nine — just the time — off at once.

MISS WARDLE

[*Coquettishly*] Time — for what?

MR. JINGLE

License, dearest of angels — give notice at the church — call you mine, to-morrow.

MISS WARDLE

The license!

MR. JINGLE

The license, —

In hurry, posthaste for a license,
In hurry, ding dong I come back.

MISS WARDLE

How you run on!

MR. JINGLE

Run on — nothing to the hours, days, weeks, months, years, when we 're united — *run* on — they 'll fly on — volt — mizzle — steam engine — thousand horse power — nothing to it.

MISS WARDLE

Can't — can't we be married before to-morrow morning?

MR. JINGLE

Impossible — can't be — notice at the church — leave the license to-day — ceremony come off to-morrow.

MISS WARDLE

I am so terrified, lest my brother should discover us!

MR. JINGLE

Discover — nonsense — last place in the world that he 'd look in — capital place to hide in. He 'll never find us.

[*Puts on his shabby hat jauntily.*

MISS WARDLE

[*Affectionately*] Don't be long.

MR. JINGLE

Long away from *you?* Cruel charmer! [*Kisses her hand and dances out of the room. Aside, as he reaches the door*] Rum old girl!

SCENE IX

The yard of the White Hart. SAM WELLER is still polishing boots, when MR. WARDLE and his solicitor, MR. PERKER, enter the yard with MR. PICKWICK. MR. PERKER is a little man, dark and thin, with restless black eyes. He is dressed in black, with a white neckcloth, ruffled shirt, and gold watch chain and seals. He carries black kid gloves in his hands. His manner is a little pompous, full of professional conceit.

MR. PERKER

[*Advancing to Sam Weller*] My friend, —

SAM WELLER

[*Without enthusiasm*] Well, sir.

MR. PERKER

[*Trying to be agreeable*] My friend, have you many people staying here, now? Pretty busy? Eh?

SAM WELLER

[*Glancing up*] Oh, werry well, sir; we shan't be bankrupts, and we shan't make our fort'ns. We eats our biled mutton without capers, and don't care for horse-radish ven we can get beef.

MR. PERKER

Ah, you 're a wag, are n't you?

SAM WELLER

My eldest brother was troubled with that complaint; it may be catching — I used to sleep with him.

MR. PERKER

[*Looking round*] This is a curious old house of yours.

SAM WELLER

If you 'd sent word you was a coming, we 'd ha' had it repaired.

[*Mr. Perker consults in a low tone with Mr. Wardle and Mr. Pickwick. He is on the point of renewing the conversation with Sam, when Mr. Pickwick interferes.*

MR. PICKWICK

The fact of the matter is that my friend here [*Pointing to Wardle*] will give you half a guinea, if you 'll answer one or two —

MR. PERKER

Now, my dear sir — my dear sir, pray allow me — my dear sir, the very first principle to be observed in these cases, is this: if you place a matter in the hands of a professional man, you must in no way interfere in the progress of the business; you must repose implicit confidence in him. Really, Mr. — [*Turning to Wardle*] I forget your friend's name.

MR. WARDLE

Pickwick.

MR. PERKER

Ah, Pickwick — really, Mr. Pickwick, my dear sir, excuse me, I shall be happy to receive any private suggestions of

yours, but you must see the impropriety of your interfering with my conduct in this case. Really, my dear sir, really —

MR. PICKWICK

My only wish, sir, was to bring this unpleasant matter to as speedy a close as possible.

MR. PERKER

Quite right — quite right.

MR. PICKWICK

With which view, I made use of the argument which my experience of men has taught me is the most likely to succeed in any case.

MR. PERKER

Aye, aye, very good, but you should have suggested it to *me*.

SAM WELLER

Look here, sir, you want me to accept of half a guinea. Werry well, I 'm agreeable : I can't say no fairer than that, can I, sir ? [*Mr. Pickwick smiles.*] Then the next question is, What on earth do you want with me, as the man said wen he see the ghost ?

MR. PERKER

Now, my dear sir — my dear sir — [*Shrugs his shoulders*] we want to know, [*Solemnly*] and we ask the question of you, in order that we may not awaken apprehensions inside — we want to know who is in this house, at present ?

SAM WELLER

Who there is in the house ! There 's a wooden leg in number six ; there 's a pair of Hessians in thirteen ; there 's

these here painted tops in the snuggery inside the bar; and five more tops in the coffee room.

MR. PERKER

Nothing more?

SAM WELLER

Stop a bit. Yes; there 's a pair of Wellingtons a good deal worn, and a pair of lady's shoes, in number five.

MR. WARDLE

[*Eagerly*] What sort of shoes?

SAM WELLER

Country make.

MR. WARDLE

Any maker's name?

SAM WELLER

Brown.

MR. WARDLE

What place?

SAM WELLER

Muggleton.

MR. WARDLE

That 's it! We 've found them!

SAM WELLER

Hush! the Wellingtons has gone to Doctors' Commons.

MR. PERKER

No.

SAM WELLER

Yes, for a license.

MR. WARDLE

We 're in time. Show us the room; not a moment is to be lost.

MR. PERKER

Pray, my dear sir — pray — caution, caution. [*Takes a red silk purse from his pocket, and looking at Sam draws out a sovereign. Sam grins.*] Show us the room at once, without announcing us, and it 's yours.

[*Sam throws the boots he was at work on into a corner, and all go out, Sam leading the way.*

SCENE X

The private sitting room at the White Hart. MISS WARDLE is sitting alone. She yawns, and taps impatiently on the table as if tired of waiting. JINGLE enters soon, waving the license above his head.

MR. JINGLE

Hurrah! [*Skips about the room.*

MISS WARDLE

You were gone an age. I 've been frightfully lonely.

[*Jingle seizes Miss Wardle's hand and whisks her around the room, till she falls into a chair, out of breath. Standing by her, he holds the license before her eyes.*

MR. JINGLE

See this! — never lonely any more — nothing part us now.

[*They look at the license together.*

MR. WARDLE *walks in, followed by* MR. PERKER *and* MR. PICKWICK. MISS WARDLE *screams and covers her face with her hands.* MR. JINGLE *crumples up the license and stuffs it into his pocket.*

MR. WARDLE

You — you are a nice rascal, are n't you ?

[*In a towering passion.*

MR. PERKER

My dear sir, my dear sir, [*Laying his hat on the table*] pray consider. Defamation of character : action for damages. Calm yourself, my dear sir, pray —

MR. WARDLE

How dare you drag my sister from my house ?

MR. PERKER

Aye — aye — very good, you may ask that. [*To Jingle*] How dare you, sir ? — eh, sir ?

MR. JINGLE

Who are you, and what are you doing here ? [*Fiercely.*

MR. WARDLE

Who is he ? You scoundrel, he 's my lawyer, Mr. Perker, of Gray's Inn. Perker, I 'll have this fellow prosecuted — indicted — I 'll — I 'll — I 'll ruin him. [*Turns abruptly to his sister*] And you, Rachel, at a time of life when you ought to know better, what do *you* mean by running away with a vagabond, disgracing your family, and making yourself miserable ? Get on your bonnet, and come back. [*Rings the bell violently, and* SAM WELLER *appears instantly.*] Call a hackney coach there, directly, and bring this lady's bill, d' ye hear — d' ye hear ?

SAM WELLER

Cert'nly, sir. [*Goes out.*

MR. WARDLE

Get on your bonnet.

MR. JINGLE

Do nothing of the kind. Leave the room, sir, — no business here — lady 's free to act as she pleases — more than one-and-twenty.

MR. WARDLE

[*Contemptuously*] More than one-and-twenty! More than one-and-forty!

MISS WARDLE

[*Indignantly*] I 'm not.

MR. WARDLE

You are — you 're fifty if you 're an hour.

[*Miss Wardle screams and faints away.*

MR. PICKWICK

[*Calling at the door*] Landlady, a glass of water directly.

MR. WARDLE

A *glass* of water! Bring a bucket, and throw it all over her; it 'll do her good, and she richly deserves it.

The Landlady *and a* Chambermaid *enter in time to hear much of* WARDLE'S *remark. The* Landlady *has a glass of water.*

LANDLADY

Ugh, you brute! [*To Miss Wardle*] There 's a dear — drink a little of this — it 'll do you good — don't give way so — there 's a love.

[*She and Chambermaid rub Miss Wardle's hands and bathe her face.*

Enter SAM WELLER.

SAM WELLER

Coach is ready, sir.

MR. WARDLE

Come along; — I 'll carry her downstairs.

[*Miss Wardle sobs and screams hysterically.*

LANDLADY

[*To Mr. Wardle indignantly*] I should like to know, sir, whether you consider yourself lord of all creation.

MR. JINGLE

Boots, get me an officer.

MR. PERKER

Stay, stay — consider, sir, consider.

MR. JINGLE

I 'll *not* consider. She 's her own mistress — see who dares to take her away — unless she wishes it.

MISS WARDLE

I *won't* be taken away. I don't wish it.

[*Falls into violent hysterics again.*

MR. PERKER

[*Taking Mr. Wardle and Mr. Pickwick apart, and speaking in a low tone*] My dear sir, we 're in a very awkward situation. It 's a distressing case — very; I never knew one more so; but really, my dear sir, we have no power to control this lady's actions. I warned you before we came, my dear sir, that there was nothing to look to but a compromise.

MR. PICKWICK

[*After a pause.*] What kind of compromise would you recommend?

MR. PERKER

Why, my dear sir, our friend is in an unpleasant position — very much so. We must be content to suffer some pecuniary loss.

MR. WARDLE

I 'll suffer any, rather than submit to this disgrace, and let her, fool as she is, be made miserable for life.

MR. PERKER

I rather think it can be done. Mr. Wardle, can you induce Miss Wardle to go to another room while we discuss a matter of business?

MR. WARDLE

Go to your room, Rachel, and get your things ready to go back to Muggleton.

MISS WARDLE

Not a step do I go unless my future husband commands me.

MR. WARDLE

[*Going toward Miss Wardle*] Will you go, or shall I carry you?

MR. JINGLE

Business matters — only a moment — return directly.

[*Miss Wardle leaves the room, supported by the Landlady and Chambermaid.*

MR. PERKER

[*Going to the door to assure himself that no one is listening*] Now, sir, is there no way of accommodating this matter?

Step this way, sir, for a moment. [*Pulls Jingle to the side of the room, away from Mr. Wardle and Mr. Pickwick*] There, sir, there — pray sit down, sir. Now, my dear sir, between you and me, we know very well that you have run off with this lady for the sake of her money. [*Jingle half rises in assumed indignation. Perker pushes him back.*] Don't frown, sir, don't frown; I say between you and me *we* know it. We are both men of the world, and *we* know very well that our friends, here, are not — eh? [*Mr. Jingle's face relaxes, and he winks at Mr. Perker.*] Very good, very good. Now the fact is, that beyond a few hundreds, the lady has little or nothing till the death of her mother — fine old lady, my dear sir.

[*The conversation between Perker and Jingle is carried on in a subdued tone while Wardle and Pickwick whisper together in another part of the room.*

MR. JINGLE

[*Emphatically*] *Old.*

MR. PERKER

[*Coughing slightly*] Why, yes; you are right, my dear sir, she is *rather* old. She comes of an old family though, my dear sir; old in every sense of the word. The members of it usually live to be eighty-five; the old lady is not seventy-three now, my dear sir. [*Takes a pinch of snuff.*

MR. JINGLE

Well —

MR. PERKER

Well, my dear sir — [*Offering his snuffbox*] you don't take snuff! ah! so much the better — expensive habit — well,

my dear sir, you 're a fine young man, man of the world — able to push your fortune, if you had capital, eh ?

MR. JINGLE

Well —

MR. PERKER

Do you comprehend me ?

MR. JINGLE

Not quite.

MR. PERKER

Don't you think — now, my dear sir, I put it to you, *don't* you think — that fifty pounds and liberty would be better than Miss Wardle and expectation ?

MR. JINGLE

Won't do — [*Rising*] not half enough !

MR. PERKER

Nay, nay, my dear sir — [*Seizing Jingle by the button*] good round sum — a man like you could treble it in no time — great deal to be done with fifty pounds, my dear sir.

MR. JINGLE

More to be done with a hundred and fifty.

MR. PERKER

Well, my dear sir — we won't waste time in splitting straws; say — say — seventy.

MR. JINGLE

Won't do.

MR. PERKER

Don't go away, my dear sir — pray don't hurry. Eighty; come : I 'll write you a check at once.

MR. JINGLE

Won't do.

MR. PERKER

Well, my dear sir, well, just tell me what *will* do.

MR. JINGLE

Expensive affair; money out of pocket — posting, nine pounds; license, three — that 's twelve — compensation, a hundred — hundred and twelve — breach of honor — and loss of the lady —

MR. PERKER

Yes, my dear sir, yes, never mind the last two items. [*With a knowing look*] That 's a hundred and twelve — say a hundred — come.

MR. JINGLE

And twenty.

MR. PERKER

Come, come, I 'll write you a check. [*Sits down at the table and takes a check book from his pocket*] I 'll make it payable the day after to-morrow. [*Looks toward Mr. Wardle, who nods sullenly*] A hundred.

MR. JINGLE

And twenty.

MR. PERKER

My dear sir —

MR. WARDLE

Give it to him, and let him go.

[*Mr. Perker writes the check, pen and ink being on the table, and Mr. Jingle puts it in his pocket.*

MR. WARDLE

[*Starting up*] Now, leave this house instantly!

MR. PERKER

My dear sir!

MR. WARDLE

And mind that nothing should have induced me to make this compromise — not even regard for my family — if I had not known that the moment you got any money in that pocket of yours, you 'd go to the devil faster, if possible, than you would without it.

MR. PERKER

My dear sir!

MR. WARDLE

Be quiet, Perker. [*To Jingle*] Leave the room, sir.

MR. JINGLE

Off directly. Bye-bye, Pickwick. [*Mr. Pickwick clenches his fists, and with difficulty keeps himself from laying hands on Jingle, who takes the license from his pocket and tosses it at Mr. Pickwick's feet*] Here, get the name altered — take home the lady — do for Tuppy.

[*Mr. Jingle goes out. Mr. Pickwick throws the inkstand at him, missing him, and darts after him.* SAM WELLER, *coming in at that moment, catches Mr. Pickwick in his arms.*

SAM WELLER

Halloo! furniter 's cheap where you come from, sir. Self-acting ink, that 'ere; it 's wrote your mark upon the wall, old gen'lm'n. [*Mr. Pickwick struggles to free himself.*] Hold still, sir; wot 's the use o' runnin' arter a man as has made his lucky and got to t'other end of the Borough by this time?

MR. PERKER

My dear sir, he 's right, perfectly right.

MR. PICKWICK

[*Wiping his brow and panting*] I suppose the scoundrel is n't worth running after.

MR. PERKER

Not worth it, surely. [*To Wardle*] Of course you wish to return immediately. [*To Sam*] Order this gentleman's carriage at once, with fresh horses. [*Sam goes out, and the others follow. Mr. Perker turns to Wardle as they go out*] You are fortunate to get rid of him so easily.

MR. WARDLE

I would pay twice as much cheerfully, for the right to kick him downstairs.

BARDELL *VERSUS* PICKWICK

CHARACTERS

Mr. Pickwick	Mr. Perker
Mr. Tupman	Mr. Lowten
Mr. Winkle	Sergeant Buzfuz
Mr. Snodgrass	Sergeant Snubbin
Sam Weller	Mr. Phunky
Master Bardell	Mr. Skimpin
Mr. Wardle	Tony Weller
Mr. Dodson	Mrs. Bardell
Mr. Fogg	Mrs. Cluppins
Mr. Jackson	Mrs. Sanders

Judge, Clerks, Ushers, Spectators, Waiter

SCENE I

Mr. Pickwick's lodgings in Goswell Street, London. He has lived here comfortably for some time with his landlady, Mrs. Bardell, who is a widow with one child. As the scene opens, Mrs. Bardell is giving Mr. Pickwick's room a prolonged dusting. Mr. Pickwick is walking to and fro impatiently, often consulting his watch, and repeatedly going to the door to look out. Mrs. Bardell is buxom and good-looking. She is dressed in black and wears a cap, a white handkerchief across her shoulders, and a white apron.

MR. PICKWICK

Mrs. Bardell.

MRS. BARDELL

Sir —

MR. PICKWICK

Your little boy is a very long time gone.

MRS. BARDELL

Why, it 's a good long way to the White Hart, sir.

MR. PICKWICK

Ah, very true; so it is. [*Pause.*] Mrs. Bardell —

MRS. BARDELL

Sir —

MR. PICKWICK

Do you think it a much greater expense to keep two people than to keep one?

MRS. BARDELL

[*In confusion*] La, Mr. Pickwick, what a question!

MR. PICKWICK

Well, but *do* you?

MRS. BARDELL

[*Bringing her duster very near Mr. Pickwick's elbow, which rests on the table*] That depends a good deal upon the person, you know, Mr. Pickwick; and whether it 's a saving and careful person, sir.

MR. PICKWICK

That 's very true, but the person I have in my eye [*Looking hard at Mrs. Bardell*] possesses these qualities, I think; and has, moreover, a considerable knowledge of the world, and a great deal of sharpness, Mrs. Bardell, which may be of material use to me.

MRS. BARDELL

[*Conscious and confused*] La, Mr. Pickwick!

MR. PICKWICK

[*Energetically*] I do, indeed; and to tell you the truth, Mrs. Bardell, I have made up my mind.

MRS. BARDELL

Dear me, sir!

MR. PICKWICK

You 'll think it very strange now, that I never consulted you about this matter, and never even mentioned it, till I sent your little boy out this morning — eh? [*Mrs. Bardell gives Mr. Pickwick a most expressive look.*] Well, what do you think?

MRS. BARDELL

Oh, Mr. Pickwick, you 're very kind, sir.

MR. PICKWICK

It 'll save you a good deal of trouble, won't it?

MRS. BARDELL

Oh, I never thought anything of the trouble, sir, and, of course, I should take more trouble to please you then, than ever; but it is so kind of you, Mr. Pickwick, to have so much consideration for my loneliness.

MR. PICKWICK

Ah, to be sure; I never thought of that. When I am in town, you 'll always have somebody to sit with you. To be sure, so you will.

MRS. BARDELL

I 'm sure I ought to be a very happy woman.

MR. PICKWICK

And your little boy —

MRS. BARDELL

[*With feeling*] Bless his heart!

MR. PICKWICK

He, too, will have a companion, a lively one, who 'll teach him, I 'll be bound, more tricks in a week than he would ever learn in a year. [*Smiles.*

MRS. BARDELL

Oh, you dear — [*Mr. Pickwick looks alarmed.*] Oh, you kind, good, playful dear!

[*Bursts into tears and throws her arms round Mr. Pickwick's neck.*

MR. PICKWICK

[*In astonishment*] Bless my soul! Mrs. Bardell, my good woman — dear me, what a situation — pray consider. Mrs. Bardell, don't — if anybody should come —

MRS. BARDELL

[*Impetuously*] Oh, let them come! I 'll never leave you, — dear, kind, good soul!

MR. PICKWICK

[*Struggling to get away*] Mercy upon me! I hear somebody coming up the stairs. Don't, don't — there 's a good creature, don't!

[*Mrs. Bardell faints, and before Mr. Pickwick can place her on a chair,* MASTER BARDELL *enters, ushering in* MR. TUPMAN, MR. WINKLE, *and* MR. SNODGRASS. *They are speechless with amazement at the situation. All stand staring silently until Master Bardell attacks Mr. Pickwick in the rear, butting with his head, striking*

and pinching, howling fearfully at the same time. Master Bardell wears a tight suit with large brass buttons, and a white frill round his neck.

MR. PICKWICK

[*In an agonized tone*] Take this little villain away. He 's mad.

MR. TUPMAN

What *is* the matter ?

MR. WINKLE

What is the matter ?

MR. SNODGRASS

What can be the matter ?

MR. PICKWICK

[*Pettishly*] I don't know. Take away the boy. [*Mr. Winkle carries Master Bardell screaming and struggling to the other end of the room.*] Now, help me lead this woman downstairs.

MRS. BARDELL

[*Faintly*] Oh, I 'm better now.

MR. TUPMAN

Let me lead you downstairs.

MRS. BARDELL

Thank you, sir — thank you.

[*Mr. Tupman leads Mrs. Bardell out. Master Bardell follows. Mr. Tupman returns while Mr. Pickwick is speaking.*

MR. PICKWICK

I cannot conceive what has been the matter with that woman. I had merely announced to her my intention of keeping a manservant, when she fell into the extraordinary paroxysm in which you found her. Very extraordinary thing.

MR. TUPMAN

Very.

MR. WINKLE

Very indeed.

MR. SNODGRASS

Most extraordinary.

MR. PICKWICK

Placed me in such an extremely awkward situation!

MR. TUPMAN

Very.

[*Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass look dubiously at each other. Mr. Snodgrass coughs slightly.*

MR. TUPMAN

There 's a man in the passage now.

MR. PICKWICK

It 's the man I spoke to you about. I sent for him to the White Hart this morning. Have the goodness to call him up, Snodgrass. [*Mr. Snodgrass goes out, and returns immediately with* SAM WELLER.] Oh — you remember me, I suppose?

SAM WELLER

I should think so. Queer start, that 'ere, but he was one too many for you, warn't he? Up to snuff and a pinch or two over — eh?

MR. PICKWICK

[*Hastily*] Never mind that matter now. I want to speak to you about something else. Sit down.

SAM WELLER

[*Putting his old white hat on the landing outside the door*] Thank 'ee, sir. It ain't a werry good 'un to look at, but it 's an astonishin' 'un to wear; [*Sits down*] and afore the brim went, it was a werry handsome tile. Hows'ever it 's lighter without it, that 's one thing, and every hole lets in some air, that 's another — wentilation gossamer I calls it.

[*Smiles on all the company.*

MR. PICKWICK

Now with regard to the matter on which I sent for you.

SAM WELLER

That 's the pint, sir; out vith it, as the father said to the child, ven he swallowed a farden.

MR. PICKWICK

I want to know, in the first place, whether you have any reason to be discontented with your present situation.

SAM WELLER

Afore I answers that 'ere question, sir, *I* should like to know, in the first place, whether you 're a goin' to purwide me with a better.

MR. PICKWICK

[*Smiling*] I have half made up my mind to engage you myself.

SAM WELLER

Have you, though?

MR. PICKWICK

Yes. [*Nods.*

SAM WELLER

Wages?

MR. PICKWICK

Twelve pounds a year.

SAM WELLER

Clothes?

MR. PICKWICK

Two suits.

SAM WELLER

Work?

MR. PICKWICK

To attend upon me, and travel about with me and these gentlemen here.

SAM WELLER

Take the bill down. I 'm let to a single gentleman, and the terms is agreed upon.

MR. PICKWICK

You accept the situation?

SAM WELLER

Cert'nly. If the clothes fits me half as well as the place, they 'll do.

MR. PICKWICK

You can get a character, of course?

SAM WELLER

Ask the landlady o' the White Hart about that, sir.

MR. PICKWICK

Can you come this evening?

SAM WELLER

[*Eagerly*] I 'll get into the clothes this minute, if they 're here.

MR. PICKWICK

Call at eight, this evening, and if the inquiries are satisfactory, they shall be provided.

SAM WELLER

Thank 'ee, sir. [*Goes out.*

SCENE II

A private sitting room at the Angel, Bury, St. Edmunds, where MR. PICKWICK, MR. WINKLE, MR. TUPMAN, and MR. SNODGRASS meet MR. WARDLE, and they dine together. MR. PICKWICK and MR. WARDLE are talking together.

MR. PICKWICK

I expect the others any moment. Your being here will be a pleasant surprise to them.

SAM WELLER *appears at the door, ushering visitors.*

MR. WARDLE

Here they are now!

MR. TUPMAN, MR. WINKLE, *and* MR. SNODGRASS *enter.* WARDLE *greets all cordially, especially* MR. TUPMAN.

Don't hang back or look sentimental about it. [*Mr. Tupman is surprised and embarrassed to meet Wardle.*] It can't be helped, old fellow. For her sake, I wish you 'd had her; for your own, I 'm very glad you have not. A young fellow like you will do better one of these days — eh? [*Slaps Tupman on the back and laughs heartily*] Well, and how are you, my fine fellows? I have just been telling Pickwick

that we must have you all down at Christmas. We 're going to have a wedding — a real wedding this time. Bella is to be married.

MR. SNODGRASS

Give you joy, sir. How is Joe?

MR. WARDLE

Very well; sleepy as ever.

MR. SNODGRASS

And your mother?

MR. WARDLE

Quite well.

MR. TUPMAN

Where is — *she*, sir?

[*Turns away his head and covers his eyes with his hand.*

MR. WARDLE

She! [*Shaking his head with a smile*] Do you mean my single relative — eh? [*Mr. Tupman nods.*] Oh, she 's gone away. She 's living at a relation's, far enough off. She could n't bear to see the girls, so I let her go.

A Servant *enters, bringing the dinner.*

But come! Here 's the dinner. You must be hungry after your ride. *I* am, without any ride at all; so let us fall to.

[*They sit down at the table.*

MR. PICKWICK

[*To Mr. Tupman*] I must tell you of my recent meeting with that fellow Jingle.

MR. TUPMAN

You don't mean you 've seen him again!

MR. PICKWICK

He was staying at this very inn under a different name. His man, a hypocritical scoundrel, told Sam his master was intending to elope with a young lady at a boarding school. I determined to prevent it, and waited outside in a fearful thunderstorm, then roused the house, and they thought I was a robber. I sent to the Angel for Sam to prove I was neither a thief nor a madman, and to my great relief our good friend Wardle came with him, and saved me from further annoyance.

MR. SNODGRASS

And there was n't any elopement?

MR. PICKWICK

Nothing of the kind. Jingle set his man on to give Sam a false story, on purpose to make a fool of me. The rheumatism I caught in that garden makes me lame at this moment.

MR. TUPMAN

[*To Wardle*] How did you happen to be here at such a fortunate time?

MR. WARDLE

I came down for some good shooting on the first, and was happy to be of assistance to my good friend Pickwick.

MR. WINKLE

I too have had something of an adventure. [*Smiles.*

MR. PICKWICK

Pray relate it.

MR. WINKLE

I was invited to stay at an editor's house during an election. The editor of the opposing paper published a false and

malicious article coupling my name with that of the lady in whose house I was staying. She fell into hysterics, and made her husband promise to horsewhip the offending editor. Your note, sir, summoning us to meet you here, was just in time to get me out of an awkward situation.

[*During Mr. Winkle's speech, Mr. Pickwick grows more and more serious. The others notice it, and there is a profound silence as Winkle concludes.*

MR. PICKWICK

[*Striking the table with his fist*] Is it not a wonderful circumstance that we seem destined to enter no man's house without involving him in some degree of trouble? Does it not, I ask, bespeak the indiscretion, or, worse than that, the blackness of heart — that I should say so! — of my followers, that, beneath whatever roof they locate, they disturb the peace of mind and happiness of some confiding female? Is it not, I say —

SAM *enters with a letter.* MR. PICKWICK *wipes his forehead, also his spectacles, and addresses* SAM *in his usual mild tone.*

What have you there, Sam?

SAM WELLER

Called at the post office just now, and found this here letter, as has laid there for two days. It 's sealed vith a vafer, and directed in round hand.

MR. PICKWICK

[*Opening the letter*] Mercy on us! what 's this? It must be a jest; it — it — can't be true.

MR. TUPMAN

What 's the matter ?

MR. WARDLE

Nobody dead, is there ?

MR. PICKWICK

[*Pushing the letter across the table to Mr. Tupman*] Will you be so good as to read that aloud ?

MR. TUPMAN

[*Reads in a trembling voice*]

Freeman's Court, Cornhill, August 28, 1830.

Bardell against Pickwick.

Sir:

Having been instructed by Mrs. Martha Bardell to commence an action against you for a breach of promise of marriage, for which the plaintiff lays her damages at fifteen hundred pounds, we beg to inform you that a writ has been issued against you in this suit in the Court of Common Pleas; and request to know, by return of post, the name of your attorney in London, who will accept service thereof.

We are, sir,

Your obedient servants,

Dodson and Fogg.

Mr. Samuel Pickwick.

[*All look at one another in astonishment, and especially at Mr. Pickwick.*

MR. SNODGRASS

Dodson and Fogg !

MR. TUPMAN

Bardell and Pickwick !

MR. WINKLE

Peace of mind and happiness of confiding females!

MR. PICKWICK

It 's a conspiracy, a base conspiracy between those two grasping attorneys, Dodson and Fogg. Mrs. Bardell would never do it; — she has n't the heart to do it; — she has n't the case to do it. Ridiculous — ridiculous!

MR. WARDLE

[*Smiling*] Of her heart, you should certainly be the best judge. I don't wish to discourage you, but I should certainly say that, of her case, Dodson and Fogg are far better judges than any of us can be.

MR. PICKWICK

It 's a vile attempt to extort money.

MR. WARDLE

[*With a short cough*] I hope it is.

MR. PICKWICK

[*Vehemently*] Who ever heard me address her in any way but that in which a lodger would address his landlady? Who ever saw me with her? Not even my friends here —

MR. TUPMAN

Except on one occasion.

[*Mr. Pickwick shows embarrassment.*

MR. WARDLE

Ah! well, that 's important. There was nothing suspicious then, I suppose.

MR. TUPMAN

[*Glancing timidly at Mr. Pickwick*] Why, there was nothing suspicious; but — I don't know how it happened, mind — she certainly was reclining in his arms.

MR. PICKWICK

Gracious powers! what a dreadful instance of the force of circumstances! So she was — so she was!

MR. WINKLE

[*Maliciously*] And our friend was soothing her anguish.

MR. PICKWICK

So I was; I won't deny it. So I was.

MR. WARDLE

Halloo! for a case in which there 's nothing suspicious, this looks rather queer — eh, Pickwick?

MR. PICKWICK

[*Resting his chin on his hands*] What a dreadful conjunction of appearances! Winkle — Tupman, I beg your pardon for the observations I made just now. We are all the victims of circumstances, and I the greatest. [*Buries his head in his hands. Mr. Winkle nods and winks to the others. Pickwick looks up and hammers on the table*] I 'll have it explained, though. I 'll see this Dodson and Fogg! I 'll go to London to-morrow.

MR. WARDLE

Not to-morrow; you are too lame.

MR. PICKWICK

Well, then, next day.

MR. WARDLE

Next day is the first of September, and you 're pledged to ride out with us, as far as Sir Geoffrey Manning's grounds, at all events, and to meet us at lunch, if you don't take the field.

MR. PICKWICK

Well, then, the day after, Thursday. [*To Sam Weller*] Sam!

SAM WELLER

Sir —

MR. PICKWICK

Take two places outside to London, on Thursday morning, for yourself and me.

SAM WELLER

Werry well, sir.

SCENE III

The office of MR. FOGG, of the firm of Dodson and Fogg. MR. FOGG sits at a desk, writing. A knock at the door is heard.

MR. FOGG

Come in.

Enter JACKSON, *one of the clerks, who announces* MR. PICKWICK *and ushers him into the room.*

Is Mr. Dodson in?

MR. JACKSON

[*To Mr. Fogg*] Just come in, sir.

MR. FOGG

Ask him to step here.

MR. JACKSON

Yes, sir. [*Goes out.*

MR. FOGG

Take a seat, sir. [*Hands a newspaper to Mr. Pickwick*] There is the paper, sir; my partner will be here directly, and we can converse about this matter, sir.

[*Mr. Pickwick takes the paper and, as he reads, peeps over it at Mr. Fogg, who sits writing at his desk.* MR. DODSON *enters soon. He is somewhat stout, and has a stern face and a loud voice.*

MR. FOGG

This is Mr. Pickwick.

MR. DODSON

Ah! you are the defendant, sir, in Bardell and Pickwick?

MR. PICKWICK

I am, sir.

MR. DODSON

Well, sir, and what do you propose?

MR. FOGG

Ah! [*Leaning back in his chair, with his hands in his pockets*] What do you propose, Mr. Pickwick?

MR. DODSON

Hush, Fogg, let me hear what Mr. Pickwick has to say.

MR. PICKWICK

I came, gentlemen, to express the surprise with which I received your letter of the other day, and to inquire what grounds of action you can have against me.

MR. FOGG

[*In amazement*] Grounds of —

MR. DODSON

Mr. Fogg, I am going to speak.

MR. FOGG

I beg your pardon, Mr. Dodson.

MR. DODSON

For the grounds of this action, sir, you will consult your own conscience and your own feelings. We, sir, are guided entirely by the statement of our client. That statement, sir, may be true, or it may be false; it may be credible, or it may be incredible; but if it is true, and if it is credible, I do not hesitate to say, sir, that our grounds of action, sir, are strong, and not to be shaken. You may be an unfortunate man, sir, or you may be a designing one; but if I were called upon, as a juryman upon my oath, sir, to express an opinion of your conduct, sir, I do not hesitate to assert that I should have but one opinion about it.

MR. FOGG

Most certainly.

MR. PICKWICK

Well, sir, you will permit me to assure you that I am a most unfortunate man, so far as this case is concerned.

MR. DODSON

I hope you are, sir; I trust you may be, sir. If you are really innocent of what is laid to your charge, you are more unfortunate than I had believed any man could possibly be. What do *you* say, Mr. Fogg?

MR. FOGG

I say precisely what you say.

MR. DODSON

The writ, sir, which commences the action, was issued regularly. Mr. Fogg, where is the book?

MR. FOGG

[*Handing him a large blank book*] Here it is.

MR. DODSON

Here it is:—[*Reads*] "Middlesex, Capias *Martha Bardell, widow*, versus *Samuel Pickwick*. Damages £1500. Dodson and Fogg for the plaintiff, Aug. 28, 1830." All regular, sir; perfectly.

MR. FOGG

Perfectly.

MR. PICKWICK

I am to understand, then, that it is really your intention to proceed with this action?

MR. DODSON

Understand, sir? That you certainly may. [*Smiles.*

MR. PICKWICK

And that the damages are actually laid at fifteen hundred pounds?

MR. DODSON

To which understanding you may add my assurance, that if we could have prevailed upon our client, they would have been laid at treble the amount, sir.

MR. FOGG

I believe Mrs. Bardell especially said, however, that she would not compromise for a farthing less.

MR. DODSON

[*Sternly*] Unquestionably. As you offer no terms, sir, [*Showing a slip of parchment in his right hand, and with his left presenting Mr. Pickwick with a paper copy of it*] I had better serve you with a copy of this writ, sir. Here is the original, sir.

MR. PICKWICK

Very well, gentlemen, very well! [*Rising and speaking angrily*] You shall hear from my solicitor, gentlemen.

MR. FOGG

[*Rubbing his hands*] We shall be very happy to do so.

MR. DODSON

[*Opening the door*] Very.

MR. PICKWICK

[*Turning at the door*] And before I go, gentlemen, permit me to say, that of all the disgraceful and rascally proceedings —

MR. DODSON

[*Politely*] Stay, sir, stay! [*Calling*] Mr. Jackson! Mr. Wicks!

MR. WICKS AND MR. JACKSON

[*Calling outside*] Sir —

MR. DODSON

I merely want you to hear what this gentleman says. Pray go on, sir — disgraceful and rascally proceedings, I think you said?

MR. PICKWICK

I did. I said, sir, that of all the disgraceful and rascally proceedings that ever were attempted, this is the most so. I repeat it, sir.

MR. DODSON

You hear that, Mr. Wicks?

MR. FOGG

You won't forget these expressions, Mr. Jackson?

MR. DODSON

Perhaps you would like to call us swindlers, sir. Pray do so, sir, if you feel disposed; now pray do, sir.

MR. PICKWICK

I do. You *are* swindlers.

MR. DODSON

Very good. [*To Wicks*] You can hear down there, I hope, Mr. Wicks?

MR. WICKS

Oh, yes, sir.

MR. FOGG

You had better come up a step or two higher, if you can't. [*To Pickwick*] Go on, sir; do go on. You had better call us thieves, sir; or perhaps you would like to assault one of us. Pray do it, sir, if you would; we will not make the smallest resistance. Pray do it, sir.

[*Mr. Fogg goes near Mr. Pickwick's clenched fist as if tempting him to the attack.* SAM *enters, and seizes Mr. Pickwick by the arm.*

SAM WELLER

You just come avay. Battledore and shuttlecock 's a werry good game, ven you ain't the shuttlecock and two lawyers the battledores, in which case it gets too excitin' to be pleasant.

Come avay, sir. If you want to ease your mind by blowing up somebody, come out into the court, and blow up me; but it 's raythcr too expensive work to be carried on here.

[*Drags Mr. Pickwick from the room.*

SCENE IV

MRS. BARDELL'S front parlor. MRS. BARDELL and her friends, MRS. CLUPPINS and MRS. SANDERS, are sitting there in animated conversation. All wear caps. MRS. CLUPPINS is small and brisk; MRS. SANDERS, large and fat. Preparations for supper are going on, and the room looks cozy. MASTER BARDELL is playing near the door. A knock is heard.

MRS. BARDELL

[*To Master Bardell*] Why don't you go to the door, you aggrawatin' child? [*He goes to the door and looks out.*

SAM WELLER

[*Speaking outside*] Well, young townskip, how 's mother?

[*All three ladies listen with deep interest.*

MASTER BARDELL

She 's pretty well; so am I.

SAM WELLER

Well, that 's a mercy. Tell her I want to speak to her, vill you, my hinfant fernomenon?

MASTER BARDELL

[*Going to his mother*] Mr. Pickwick's man wants to see you, ma.

MRS. BARDELL

[*Much agitated*] Mr. Pickwick's servant!

MRS. CLUPPINS

Bless my soul!

MRS. SANDERS

Well, I raly would *not* ha' believed it, unless I had ha' happened to ha' been here!

[*All three ladies seem at a loss what to do. To relieve her feelings, Mrs. Bardell thumps Master Bardell, who cries loudly.*

MRS. BARDELL

Hold your noise — do — you naughty creetur!

MRS. SANDERS

Yes; don't worrit your poor mother.

MRS. CLUPPINS

She 's quite enough to worrit her, as it is, without you, Tommy.

MRS. SANDERS

Ah! worse luck, poor lamb!

[*Master Bardell howls more loudly.*

MRS. BARDELL

Now, what *shall* I do?

MRS. CLUPPINS

I think you ought to see him, but on no account without a witness.

MRS. SANDERS

[*Eagerly*] *I* think two witnesses would be more lawful.

MRS. BARDELL

Perhaps he 'd better come in here.

MRS. CLUPPINS

[*Eagerly*] To be sure. [*To Sam Weller outside*] Walk in, young man, and shut the street door first.

Enter SAM WELLER.

SAM WELLER

Evenin'. Werry sorry to 'casion any personal inconvenience, but as me and my governor 's only jest come to town, and is jest going away agin, it can't be helped, you see.

MRS. CLUPPINS

Of course, the young man can't help the faults of his master.

MRS. SANDERS

Certainly not.

SAM WELLER

So all I 've come about, is jest this here; first, to give my governor's notice — there it is. [*Handing Mrs. Bardell the written notice*] Secondly, to pay the rent — here it is. Thirdly, to say as all his things is to be put together, and give to anybody as we sends for 'em. Fourthly, that you may let the place as soon as you like — and that 's all.

MRS. BARDELL

Whatever has happened, I always have said, and always will say, that in every respect but one, Mr. Pickwick has always behaved himself like a perfect gentleman. His money always was as good as the bank, always. [*Puts her handkerchief to her eyes*] I 'll get the receipt. [*Goes out.*

MRS. CLUPPINS

Poor dear!

MRS. SANDERS

Ah, poor thing!

MRS. CLUPPINS

I raly cannot contain myself, when I think of such perjury. I don't wish to say anything to make you uncomfortable, young man, but your master 's an old brute, and I wish I had him here to tell him so.

SAM WELLER

I wish you had.

MRS. CLUPPINS

To see how dreadful she takes on, going moping about, and taking no pleasure in nothing, except when her friends comes in, out of charity, to sit with her, and make her comfortable — it 's shocking!

MRS. SANDERS

Barbareous!

MRS. CLUPPINS

And your master, young man! A gentleman with money, as could never feel the expense of a wife, no more than nothing; — why, there ain't the faintest shade of an excuse for his behavior! Why don't he marry her?

SAM WELLER

Ah, to be sure; that 's the question.

MRS. CLUPPINS

Question, indeed! She 'd question him, if she 'd my spirit. Hows'ever, there *is* law for us women, mis'rable creeturs as they 'd make us, if they could; and that your master will find out, young man, to his cost, afore he 's six months older.

[*Mrs. Cluppins and Mrs. Sanders smile at each other.*

MRS. BARDELL

[*Returning with the receipt in her hand*] Here 's the receipt, Mr. Weller, and here 's the change. I suppose you 've heard what 's going forward, Mr. Weller?

SAM WELLER

I 've heerd somethin' on it.

MRS. BARDELL

It 's a terrible thing to be dragged before the public in that way, Mr. Weller; but I see now that it 's the only thing I ought to do, and my lawyers, Mr. Dodson and Fogg, tell me, that with the evidence as we shall call, we must succeed. I don't know what I should do, Mr. Weller, if I did n't.

SAM WELLER

Ven is it expected to come on?

MRS. BARDELL

Either in February or March.

MRS. CLUPPINS

What a number of witnesses there 'll be, won't there?

MRS. SANDERS

Ah, won't there!

MRS. CLUPPINS

And won't Mr. Dodson and Fogg be wild if the plaintiff should n't get it — when they do it all on speculation!

MRS. SANDERS

Ah! won't they!

MRS. CLUPPINS

But the plaintiff must get it.

MRS. BARDELL

I hope so.

MRS. SANDERS

Oh, there can't be any doubt about it.

SAM WELLER

[*Rising*] Vell, all I can say is, that I wish you *may* get it.

MRS. BARDELL

Thank 'ee, Mr. Weller.

SAM WELLER

And of them Dodson and Foggs, as does these sort o' things on spec, as well as the other kind and gen'rous people o' the same purfession, as sets people by the ears, free gratis for nothin', and sets their clerks to find out little disputes among their neighbors as vants settlin' by means o' lawsuits — all I can say o' them is, that I vish they had the revard I 'd give 'em.

MRS. BARDELL

Ah, I wish they had the reward that every kind and generous heart would be inclined to bestow on them!

SAM WELLER

Amen to that, and a fat and happy livin' they 'd get out of it! Wish you good night, ladies. [*Goes out.*

MRS. CLUPPINS

What a fine spoken young man!

MRS. SANDERS

You may well say so. I only wish the master was equal to the man.

SCENE V

MR. PICKWICK'S room at the George and Vulture. MR. PICKWICK, MR. TUPMAN, MR. WINKLE, and MR. SNODGRASS are sitting together.

MR. TUPMAN

[*Looking round*] Very pleasant quarters you have here.

MR. PICKWICK

Yes. I knew the George and Vulture before. I 've often been here. It 's a good inn, and I 'm very comfortable.

MR. WINKLE

I suppose Dodson and Fogg are going on.

MR. PICKWICK

[*Dryly*] I suppose they are. [*A knock is heard.*

MR. PICKWICK

Come in.

A Waiter *opens the door and is about to announce a* Visitor; *but before he has time to speak,* JACKSON, *clerk of Dodson and Fogg, crowds by him and enters the room briskly. He is ill-bred and boorish.*

JACKSON

How de do, sir? [*Nodding familiarly to Mr. Pickwick. Mr. Pickwick, in surprise, returns the nod with a distant bow and seems not to recognize him.*] I have called from Dodson and Fogg's.

MR. PICKWICK

I refer you to my attorney, sir — Mr. Perker, of Gray's Inn. [*To Waiter*] Waiter, show this gentleman out.

MR. JACKSON

Beg your pardon, Mr. Pickwick. [*Putting his hat on the floor and drawing a strip of parchment from his pocket*] But personal service, by clerk or agent, in these cases, you know, Mr. Pickwick — nothing like caution, sir, in all legal forms. [*Rests his hands on the table and looks round, smiling*] Now, come; don't let 's have no words about such a little matter as this. Which of you gentlemen's name 's Snodgrass? [*Mr. Snodgrass starts when he hears his name.*] Ah! I thought so. I 've got a little something to trouble you with, sir.

MR. SNODGRASS

Me!

MR. JACKSON

It 's only a subpœna in Bardell and Pickwick on behalf of the plaintiff. [*Selects a slip of paper and takes a shilling from his pocket*] It 'll come on, in the settens after Term; fourteenth of Febooary, we expect; we 've marked it a special jury cause, and it 's only the tenth on the list. That 's yours, Mr. Snodgrass. [*Gives the paper and the shilling to Mr. Snodgrass, showing and keeping the original summons, then turns sharply to Mr. Tupman*] I think I ain't mistaken when I say your name 's Tupman, am I?

MR. TUPMAN

Yes, my name *is* Tupman, sir.

MR. JACKSON

And that other gentleman 's Mr. Winkle, I think?

MR. WINKLE

[*Falteringly*] My name is Winkle.

[*Jackson gives a slip of paper and a shilling to Mr. Tupman and Mr. Winkle as before.*

MR. JACKSON

Now, I 'm afraid you 'll think me rather troublesome, but I want somebody else, if it ain't inconvenient. I have Samuel Weller's name here, Mr. Pickwick.

MR. PICKWICK

[*Rings. The* Waiter *appears.*] Send my servant here, waiter. [*The Waiter goes out. There is an awkward pause for a moment; then Mr. Pickwick speaks indignantly*] I suppose, sir, that it is the intention of your employers to seek to criminate me upon the testimony of my own friends.

MR. JACKSON

[*Playfully*] Not knowin', can't say.

MR. PICKWICK

For what other reason, sir, are these subpœnas served upon them, if not for this?

MR. JACKSON

[*Shaking his head*] Very good plant, Mr. Pickwick, but it won't do. No harm in trying, but there 's little to be got out of me. No, no, Mr. Pickwick, Perker's people must guess what we 've served these subpœnas for. If they can't, they must wait till the action comes on, and then they 'll find out.

SAM WELLER *enters.*

Samuel Weller?

SAM WELLER

Vun o' the truest things as you 've said for many a long year. [*With great composure.*

MR. JACKSON

Here 's a subpœna for you, Mr. Weller.

SAM WELLER

What 's that in English ?

MR. JACKSON

Here 's the original.

SAM WELLER

Which ?

MR. JACKSON

This. [*Shakes the parchment.*

SAM WELLER

Oh, that 's the 'riginal, is it ? Well, I 'm werry glad I 've seen the 'rig'nal, cos it 's a gratifyin' sort o' thing, and eases vun's mind so much.

MR. JACKSON

[*Giving the shilling*] And here 's the shilling. It 's from Dodson and Fogg's.

SAM WELLER

And it 's uncommon handsome o' Dodson and Fogg, as knows so little of me, to come down vith a present. I feel it as a werry high compliment, sir ; it 's a werry hon'rable thing to them, as they knows how to reward merit werever they meets it. Besides wich, it 's affectin' to one's feelin's.

[*Pretends to wipe his eyes on his coat sleeve. Jackson goes out. Sam Weller looks after him in a ridiculous manner.*

MR. TUPMAN

[*Looking at the notice in his hand*] It seems to me, sir, that Dodson and Fogg might have spared us this.

MR. PICKWICK

They spare nothing and no one. Don't distress yourselves on my account. I shall not hold you responsible for the methods of Dodson and Fogg. [*All rise to go out.*

SAM WELLER

I only wish I might meet that impident chap as brought these notices, in the middle o' the road, sometime, where there was plenty o' room and not too much passin'.

[*All go out.*

SCENE VI

The court room. Spectators have begun to arrive, among them TONY WELLER, SAM'S father, when MR. PICKWICK'S friends are escorted to their seats by LOWTEN, PERKER'S clerk, and MR. PICKWICK enters with MR. PERKER. They sit down. The JUDGE and Lawyers wear wigs and gowns. Officers, Ushers, and the Clerk of the Court are present.

MR. PICKWICK

[*Looking toward an inclosure*] That 's the witness box, I suppose?

MR. PERKER

That 's the witness box, my dear sir.

[*Takes papers from the blue bag Lowten has put at his feet.*

MR. PICKWICK

[*Looking toward other seats on his right*] That 's where the jurymen sit, is it not?

MR. PERKER

The identical place, my dear sir.

MR. PHUNKY *enters, bowing to* MR. PERKER *and* MR. PICKWICK. SERGEANT SNUBBIN *follows, attended by his* Clerk, *carrying a crimson bag of papers, which he lays on the table.* SERGEANT BUZFUZ *enters and bows to* SERGEANT SNUBBIN. MR. SKIMPIN *follows.*

MR. PICKWICK

Who 's that?

MR. PERKER

Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz. He 's opposed to us; he leads on the other side. That gentleman behind him is Mr. Skimpin, his junior.

FIRST OFFICER

Silence!

[*The Barristers rise as the* JUDGE *enters. He is short and fat. He sits down at his table, bowing to the Barristers, and lays his three-cornered hat on the table.*

SECOND OFFICER

Silence!

USHERS

Silence!

Enter an Usher *escorting* MRS. BARDELL, *supported by* MRS. CLUPPINS, *to the other end of the seat occupied by* MR. PICKWICK. MRS. BARDELL *is much overcome.* MR. DODSON *hands in an extra large umbrella, and* MR. FOGG *brings a pair of pattens.* MRS. SANDERS *leads in* MASTER BARDELL.

MRS. BARDELL

[*Kissing Master Bardell effusively*] Will somebody be so kind as to tell me where I am?

[*Mrs. Cluppins and Mrs. Sanders weep in sympathy.*

MR. DODSON

Pray compose yourself, Mrs. Bardell.

MR. FOGG

Pray compose yourself, madam.

[*The Spectators are visibly affected. Mrs. Cluppins puts Master Bardell in front of his mother, under the Judge's eye; he resists, weeping.*

CLERK

Bardell and Pickwick.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

I am for the plaintiff, my lord.

JUDGE

Who is with you, brother Buzfuz?

MR. SKIMPIN

I am, my lord.

SERGEANT SNUBBIN

I appear for the defendant, my lord.

JUDGE

Anybody with you, brother Snubbin?

SERGEANT SNUBBIN

Mr. Phunky, my lord.

JUDGE

Sergeant Buzfuz and Mr. Skimpin for the plaintiff; [*Writing in his notebook*] for the defendant, Sergeant Snubbin and Mr. Monkey.

MR. PHUNKY

Beg your Lordship's pardon, Phunky.

JUDGE

Oh, very good; I never had the pleasure of hearing the gentleman's name before. Go on.

USHERS

Silence! Silence!

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

[*Rising, settling his wig, whispering to Dodson and Fogg*] Gentlemen of the jury: — never in the whole course of my professional experience have I approached a case with feelings of such deep emotion. I could not endure the responsibility, were I not sustained by a strong conviction that the cause of my much-injured and oppressed client must prevail with the high-minded men whom I see before me.

[*Several Jurymen begin to take notes eagerly.*

You are aware, gentlemen, that this is an action for a breach of promise of marriage, in which the damages are laid at £1500. You shall hear the facts and circumstances of the case detailed by me, and proved by the unimpeachable female whom I will place in that box before you.

[*As he speaks the word "box" with a mighty emphasis, he smites the table.*

The plaintiff, gentlemen, [*In a melancholy voice*] is a widow. The late Mr. Bardell, after enjoying for many years the esteem and confidence of his sovereign, as one of the guardians of his royal revenues, glided almost imperceptibly from the world, to seek elsewhere for that repose and peace which a custom house can never afford. [*His voice falters.*

Some time before his death he had stamped his likeness upon a little boy. With this little boy, the only pledge of her departed exciseman, Mrs. Bardell shrank from the world, and courted the retirement and tranquillity of Goswell Street; and here she placed in her front parlor window a written placard, bearing this inscription — "Apartments furnished for a single gentleman. Inquire within."

A JUROR

There is no date to that, is there, sir?

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

There is no date, gentlemen, but I am instructed to say that it was put in the plaintiff's parlor window just three years ago. I entreat the attention of the jury to the wording of this document. "Apartments furnished for a single gentleman." Mrs. Bardell's opinions of the opposite sex, gentlemen, were derived from a long contemplation of the inestimable qualities of her lost husband. She had no fear; she had no distrust; she had no suspicion; all was confidence and reliance. "Mr. Bardell," said the widow, "was a man of honor; Mr. Bardell was a man of his word; Mr. Bardell was no deceiver; Mr. Bardell was once a single gentleman himself; *to* single gentlemen I look for protection, for assistance, for comfort, and for consolation; *in* single gentlemen I shall perpetually see something to remind me of what Mr. Bardell was, when he first won my young and untried affections; to a single gentleman, then, shall my lodgings be let."

Actuated by this beautiful and touching impulse (among the best impulses of our imperfect nature, gentlemen), the lonely and desolate widow dried her tears, furnished her first floor, caught the innocent boy to her maternal bosom, and put the bill up in her parlor window. Did it remain there long? No. The serpent was on the watch, the train was laid, the mine was preparing, the sapper and miner was at work. Before the bill had been in the parlor window three days — three days — gentlemen — a Being, erect upon two legs, and bearing all the outward semblance of a man, and not of a monster, knocked at the door of Mrs. Bardell's house. He

inquired within; he took the lodgings; and on the very next day he entered into possession of them. This man was Pickwick — Pickwick, the defendant.

[*He pauses to take breath. The Judge wakes and writes something with a pen with no ink in it.*

Of this man Pickwick I will say little; the subject presents but few attractions; and I, gentlemen, am not the man, nor are you, gentlemen, the men, to delight in the contemplation of revolting heartlessness, and of systematic villainy.

[*Mr. Pickwick gives a violent start, as if he had an idea of assaulting Sergeant Buzfuz. Mr. Perker signals for him to keep quiet. Mrs. Cluppins and Mrs. Sanders listen with admiration.*

I say systematic villainy, gentlemen, and when I say systematic villainy, let me tell the defendant Pickwick, if he be in court, as I am informed he is, that it would have been more decent in him, more becoming, in better judgment, and in better taste, if he had stopped away. Let me tell him, gentlemen, that any gestures of dissent or disapprobation in which he may indulge in this court will not go down with you; that you will know how to value and how to appreciate them; and let me tell him further, that a counsel, in the discharge of his duty to his client, is neither to be intimidated, nor bullied, nor put down; and that any attempt to do either the one or the other, or the first, or the last, will recoil on the head of the attempter, be he plaintiff or be he defendant, be his name Pickwick, or Noakes, or Stoakes, or Stiles, or Brown, or Thompson.

I shall show you, gentlemen, that for two years Pickwick continued to reside constantly, and without interruption or

intermission, at Mrs. Bardell's house. I shall show you that Mrs. Bardell, during the whole of that time, waited on him, attended to his comforts, cooked his meals, and, in short, enjoyed his fullest trust and confidence. I shall show you that, on many occasions, he gave halfpence, and on some occasions even sixpences, to her little boy; and I shall prove to you, by an unimpeachable witness, that on one occasion he patted the boy on the head, and made use of this remarkable expression, [*With solemn emphasis*] "How should you like to have another father?"

I shall prove to you, gentlemen, that about a year ago Pickwick suddenly began to absent himself from home, during long intervals, as if with the intention of gradually breaking off from my client; but I shall show you, also, that his resolution was not at that time sufficiently strong, or that the charms of my client prevailed against his unmanly intentions; I shall prove that on one occasion, when he returned from the country, he distinctly offered her marriage, previously, however, taking care that there should be no witnesses; and I can prove on the testimony of three of his own friends — most unwilling witnesses, gentlemen — that he was discovered by them holding the plaintiff in his arms, and soothing her agitation by his endearments.

[*The audience seem much impressed by this statement. Sergeant Buzfuz produces two scraps of paper.*

And now, gentlemen, but one word more. Two letters have passed between these parties, letters which are admitted to be in the handwriting of the defendant, and which speak volumes indeed. These letters, too, bespeak the character of the man. They are not open, fervent, eloquent epistles,

breathing the language of affectionate attachment. They are covert, sly, underhanded communications, but, fortunately, far more conclusive than if couched in the most glowing language — letters that must be viewed with a cautious and suspicious eye — letters that were evidently intended at the time to mislead any third parties into whose hands they might fall.

Let me read the first: — "Garraway's, twelve o'clock. Dear Mrs. B., Chops and tomato sauce. Yours, Pickwick." Gentlemen, what does this mean? Chops and tomato sauce! Yours, Pickwick! Chops! Gracious heavens! and tomato sauce! Gentlemen, is the happiness of a sensitive and confiding female to be trifled away by such shallow artifices as these?

The next has no date whatever, which in itself is suspicious. "Dear Mrs. B., I shall not be at home till to-morrow. Slow coach." And then follows this very remarkable expression, "Don't trouble yourself about the warming pan." The warming pan! Why, gentlemen, who *does* trouble himself about a warming pan? When was the peace of mind of man or woman broken or disturbed by a warming pan, which is in itself a harmless, a useful, and I will add, gentlemen, a comforting article of domestic furniture? Why is Mrs. Bardell so earnestly entreated not to agitate herself about this warming pan, unless it is a mere cover for hidden fire — a mere substitute for some endearing word or promise, agreeably to a preconcerted system of correspondence, artfully contrived by Pickwick with a view to his contemplated desertion, and which I am not in a condition to explain? And what does this allusion to the slow coach mean? For aught I know, it may be a reference to Pickwick himself, who has most unquestionably been a criminally slow coach during the whole

of this transaction, but whose speed will now be very unexpectedly accelerated, and whose wheels, gentlemen, as he will find to his cost, will very soon be greased by you!

[*Pauses and looks at the Jury. One Juryman laughs.*

But enough of this, gentlemen, it is difficult to smile with an aching heart; it is ill jesting when our deepest sympathies are awakened. My client's hopes and prospects are ruined, and it is no figure of speech to say that her occupation is gone indeed. The bill is down — but there is no tenant. Eligible single gentlemen pass and repass — but there is no invitation for them to inquire within or without. All is gloom and silence in the house; even the voice of the child is hushed; his infant sports are disregarded when his mother weeps. But Pickwick, gentlemen, Pickwick, the ruthless destroyer of this domestic oasis in the desert of Goswell Street — Pickwick, who has choked up the well and thrown ashes on the sward — Pickwick, who comes before you to-day with his heartless tomato sauce and warming pans — Pickwick still rears his head with unblushing effrontery, and gazes without a sigh on the ruin he has made. Damages, gentlemen — — heavy damages — is the only punishment with which you can visit him; the only recompense you can award to my client. And for those damages she now appeals to an enlightened, a high-minded, a right-feeling, a conscientious, a dispassionate, a sympathizing, a contemplative jury of her civilized countrymen. [*Sergeant Buzfuz sits down; the Judge wakes suddenly. In a moment Sergeant Buzfuz rises again*] Call Elizabeth Cluppins.

FIRST USHER

Elizabeth Tuppins!

SECOND USHER

[*Farther from the Judge, nearer the door*] Elizabeth Jupkins!

THIRD USHER

[*Going to the door and calling outside*] Elizabeth Muffins! Elizabeth Muffins!

[*Mrs. Cluppins is escorted to the witness box by Mrs. Bardell, Mrs. Sanders, Mr. Dodson, and Mr. Fogg. Mrs. Bardell stands near, with handkerchief and pattens in one hand, and a large bottle of smelling salts in the other. Mrs. Sanders stands with Mrs. Bardell, holding her large umbrella.*

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Mrs. Cluppins, pray compose yourself, ma'am. [*Mrs. Cluppins sobs aloud and seems about to faint.*] Do you recollect, Mrs. Cluppins, being in Mrs. Bardell's back one pair of stairs, on one particular morning in July last, when she was dusting Pickwick's apartment?

MRS. CLUPPINS

Yes, my lord and jury, I do.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Mr. Pickwick's sitting room was the first floor front, I believe?

MRS. CLUPPINS

Yes, it were, sir.

JUDGE

What were you doing in the back room, ma'am?

MRS. CLUPPINS

My lord and jury, I will not deceive you.

JUDGE

You had better not, ma'am.

MRS. CLUPPINS

I was there unbeknown to Mrs. Bardell; I had been out with a little basket, gentlemen, to buy three pound of red kidney purtaties, which was three pound tuppence ha'penny, when I see Mrs. Bardell's street door on the jar.

JUDGE

On the what?

SERGEANT SNUBBIN

Partly open, my lord.

JUDGE

She *said* on the jar.

SERGEANT SNUBBIN

It 's all the same, my lord.

JUDGE

[*Doubtfully*] I 'll make a note of it.

MRS. CLUPPINS

I walked in, gentlemen, just to say good mornin', and went in a permiscuous manner, upstairs, and into the back room. Gentlemen, there was the sound of voices in the front room, and —

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

And you listened, I believe, Mrs. Cluppins?

MRS. CLUPPINS

[*Majestically*] Beggin' your pardon, sir, I would scorn the haction. The voices was very loud, sir, and forced themselves upon my ear.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Well, Mrs. Cluppins, you were not listening, but you heard the voices. Was one of those voices Pickwick's?

MRS. CLUPPINS

Yes, it were, sir.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

What did Mr. Pickwick say?

MRS. CLUPPINS

He asked Mrs. Bardell if it cost much more to keep two people than one.

[*Mrs. Cluppins looks at the Jury meaningly. Her words produce a marked effect on the listeners.*

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

I trust the gentlemen of the jury are attending to this witness. What else did Mr. Pickwick say?

MRS. CLUPPINS

He said as how he 'd made up his mind.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

What did Mrs. Bardell say to that?

MRS. CLUPPINS

She called him a dear.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

I suppose Mr. Pickwick made some answer to that.

MRS. BARDELL

He called her a good creature, and she said she 'd never leave him. And then he seemed ashamed of what he 'd done, and said what if anybody should come.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Anything more, Mrs. Cluppins?

MRS. CLUPPINS

And then some gentlemen came upstairs, and I thought it was no harm to peep in the door, and Mr. Pickwick was holding Mrs. Bardell in his arms, and she was quiet like, as if she 'd fainted.

[*Sergeant Buzfuz sits down with a smile. The Jury look grave. Mrs. Cluppins and Mrs. Sanders are escorted out by Mr. Jackson.*

MR. SKIMPIN

Nathaniel Winkle!

MR. WINKLE

Here!

[*Goes into the witness box and bows to the Judge.*

JUDGE

[*Sharply*] Don't look at me, sir — look at the jury.

[*Mr. Winkle looks around helplessly.*

MR. SKIMPIN

Now, sir, have the goodness to let his lordship and the jury know what your name is, will you?

MR. WINKLE

Winkle.

JUDGE

[*Angrily*] What 's your Christian name, sir?

MR. WINKLE

Nathaniel, sir.

JUDGE

Daniel — any other name?

MR. WINKLE

Nathaniel, sir — my lord, I mean.

JUDGE

Nathaniel Daniel, or Daniel Nathaniel?

MR. WINKLE

No, my lord, only Nathaniel; not Daniel at all.

JUDGE

What did you tell me it was Daniel for, then, sir?

MR. WINKLE

I did n't, my lord.

JUDGE

[*Severely*] You did, sir. How could I have got Daniel on my notes, unless you told me so, sir?

MR. SKIMPIN

Mr. Winkle has rather a short memory, my lord. We shall find means to refresh it before we have quite done with him, I dare say.

JUDGE

You had better be careful, sir.

[*Mr. Winkle bows in great confusion.*

MR. SKIMPIN

Mr. Winkle, attend to me, if you please, sir; and let me recommend you, for your own sake, to bear in mind his lordship's injunction to be careful. I believe you are a particular friend of Pickwick, the defendant, are you not?

MR. WINKLE

I have known Mr. Pickwick now, as well as I recollect at this moment, nearly —

MR. SKIMPIN

Pray, Mr. Winkle, do not evade the question. Are you, or are you not, a particular friend of the defendant's?

MR. WINKLE

I was just about to say that —

MR. SKIMPIN

Will you, or will you not, answer my question, sir?

JUDGE

[*Turning over the leaves of his notebook*] If you don't answer the question, you 'll be committed, sir.

MR. SKIMPIN

Come, sir, yes or no, if you please.

MR. WINKLE

Yes, I am.

MR. SKIMPIN

Yes, you are. And why could n't you say that at once, sir? Perhaps you know the plaintiff too? Eh, Mr. Winkle?

MR. WINKLE

I don't know her; I 've seen her.

MR. SKIMPIN

Oh, you don't know her, but you 've seen her? Now, have the goodness to tell the gentlemen of the jury what you mean by *that*, Mr. Winkle.

MR. WINKLE

I mean that I am not intimate with her, but I have seen her when I went to call on Mr. Pickwick in Goswell Street.

MR. SKIMPIN

How often have you seen her, sir?

MR. WINKLE

How often?

MR. SKIMPIN

Yes, Mr. Winkle, how often? I 'll repeat the question for you a dozen times, if you require it, sir.

MR. WINKLE

It is quite impossible for me to say how many times I have seen Mrs. Bardell.

MR. SKIMPIN

Have you seen her twenty times?

MR. WINKLE

Certainly — more than that.

MR. SKIMPIN

A hundred times?

MR. WINKLE

I think not.

MR. SKIMPIN

Can you not swear that you have seen her more than fifty times?

MR. WINKLE

[*In great confusion, wiping his face*] I cannot swear to that.

MR. SKIMPIN

You had better take care of yourself, and mind what you are about. Pray, Mr. Winkle, do you remember calling on the defendant Pickwick at these apartments in the plaintiff's house in Goswell Street, on one particular morning in the month of July last?

MR. WINKLE

Yes, I do.

MR. SKIMPIN

Were you accompanied on that occasion by a friend of the name of Tupman, and another of the name of Snodgrass?

MR. WINKLE

Yes, I was.

MR. SKIMPIN

Are they here?

MR. WINKLE

Yes, they are.

[*Looking earnestly toward Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass.*

MR. SKIMPIN

Pray attend to me, Mr. Winkle, and never mind your friends. [*Looks at the Jury whenever he makes an insinuation, or whenever he wishes to call their attention to his remarks*] They must tell their stories without any previous consultation with you, if none has yet taken place. Now, sir, tell the gentlemen of the jury what you saw on entering the defendant's room, on that particular morning. Come; out with it, sir; we must have it, sooner or later.

MR. WINKLE

[*Hesitating*] The defendant, Mr. Pickwick, was holding the plaintiff in his arms, and the plaintiff appeared to have fainted away.

MR. SKIMPIN

Did you hear the defendant say anything?

MR. WINKLE

I heard him call Mrs. Bardell a good creature, and ask her to compose herself, for what a situation it was, if anybody should come, or words to that effect.

MR. SKIMPIN

Now, Mr. Winkle, I have only one more question to ask you, and I beg you to bear in mind his lordship's caution. Will you undertake to swear that Pickwick, the defendant, did not say on the occasion in question, "My dear Mrs. Bardell, you 're a good creature; compose yourself to this situation, for to this situation you must come," or words to *that* effect?

MR. WINKLE

[*Faltering and confused*] I — I did n't understand him so, certainly. I was on the staircase, and could n't hear distinctly; the impression on my mind is —

MR. SKIMPIN

The gentlemen of the jury want none of the impressions on your mind, Mr. Winkle, which I fear would be of little service to honest, straightforward men. You were on the staircase, and did n't distinctly hear; but you will not swear that Pickwick did not make use of the expressions I have quoted? Do I understand that?

MR. WINKLE

No, I will not.

[*Mr. Skimpin sits down triumphant. Mr. Winkle leaves the box and goes out in distress.*

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Susannah Sanders!

MRS. SANDERS

Here, sir. [*Goes into the witness box.*

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Do you know Mrs. Bardell?

MRS. SANDERS

Sure I do, and I 've always believed and always said that Mr. Pickwick would marry her some day.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

What made you think that?

MRS. SANDERS

Ever since last July it 's been the talk of the neighborhood that them two was engaged. I was told it myself by Mrs. Mudberry which keeps a mangle, and Mrs. Bunkin which clear-starches, but I don't see either of them ladies here.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Have you ever heard Mr. Pickwick say anything particular to Mrs. Bardell?

MRS. SANDERS

I heard him ask the little boy how he should like to have another father.

[*Sergeant Buzfuz sits down, and Sergeant Snubbin rises.*

SERGEANT SNUBBIN

Why do you think Mrs. Bardell fainted away that morning in July?

MRS. SANDERS

I think it was because Pickwick asked her to name the day. I know I fainted away stone dead when Sanders asked *me* to name the day, and I believe that everybody as calls herself a lady would do the same.

JUDGE

While you were keeping company with Mr. Sanders, did you receive love letters from him?

MRS. SANDERS

Yes, please your honor, same as other ladies.

JUDGE

Did he ever call you chops or tomato sauce?

MRS. SANDERS

I can't say he ever did. He often called me a duck. He was very fond of ducks, and he did n't care for chops or tomato sauce. Perhaps that was the reason.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

[*Rising with an air of unusual importance*] Call Samuel Weller.

SAM WELLER *enters and steps into the box briskly the instant his name is spoken. He puts his hat on the floor and leans his arms on the rail, then surveys the* JUDGE *and* Lawyers *with cheerful confidence.*

JUDGE

What 's your name, sir?

SAM WELLER

Sam Weller, my lord.

JUDGE

Do you spell it with a *V* or a *W*?

SAM WELLER

That depends upon the taste and fancy of the speller, my lord. I never had occasion to spell it more than once or twice in my life, but I spells it with a *V*.

TONY WELLER

[*From a remote corner*] Quite right too, Samivel, quite right. Put it down a *we*, my lord, put it down a *we*.

JUDGE

Who is that, who dares to address the court? Usher.

USHER

Yes, my lord.

JUDGE

Bring that person here instantly.

USHER

Yes, my lord.

[*There is a general commotion, with the people trying to see who spoke. The Usher walks about and searches in the wrong place.*

JUDGE

Do you know who that was, sir?

SAM WELLER

I raythe suspect it was my father, my lord.

JUDGE

Do you see him here now?

SAM WELLER

[*Staring at the ceiling*] No, I don't, my lord.

JUDGE

If you could have pointed him out, I would have committed him instantly. [*Sam Weller bows cheerfully.*

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Now, Mr. Weller.

SAM WELLER

Now, sir.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

I believe you are in the service of Mr. Pickwick, the defendant in this case. Speak up, if you please, Mr. Weller.

SAM WELLER

I mean to speak up, sir. I am in the service o' that 'ere gen'l'man, and a werry good service it is.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Little to do, and plenty to get, I suppose?

SAM WELLER

Oh, quite enough to get, sir, as the soldier said ven they ordered him three hundred and fifty lashes.

[*The Spectators smile.*

JUDGE

You must not tell us what the soldier, or any other man, said, sir; it 's not evidence.

SAM WELLER

Werry good, my lord.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Do you recollect anything particular happening on the morning when you were first engaged by the defendant?

SAM WELLER

Yes, I do, sir.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Have the goodness to tell the jury what it was.

SAM WELLER

I had a reg'lar new fit out o' clothes that mornin', gen'l'men of the jury, and that was a werry partickler and uncommon circumstance vith me in those days. [*A general laugh.*

JUDGE

You had better be careful, sir.

SAM WELLER

So Mr. Pickwick said at the time, my lord; and I was werry careful o' that ere suit o' clothes; werry careful indeed, my lord.

[*The Judge looks sternly at Sam for some time, but Sam is serene and undisturbed.*

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Weller, [*Folding his arms*] that you saw nothing of this fainting on the part of the plaintiff, which you have heard described by the witnesses?

SAM WELLER

Certainly not; I was in the passage till they called me up, and then the old lady was not there.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

[*Dipping his pen into the ink*] Now, attend, Mr. Weller; you were in the passage, and yet saw nothing of what was going forward. Have you a pair of eyes, Mr. Weller?

SAM WELLER

Yes, I have a pair of eyes, and that 's just it. If they wos a pair o' patent double million magnifyin' gas microscopes of hextra power, p'r'aps I might be able to see through a flight o' stairs and a deal door; but bein' only eyes, you see, my wision 's limited.

[*The Spectators titter; the Judge smiles; Sergeant Buzfuz looks crestfallen.*

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Now, Mr. Weller, I 'll ask you a question on another point, if you please.

SAM WELLER

If you please, sir.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Do you remember going up to Mrs. Bardell's house, one night in November last?

SAM WELLER

Oh, yes, very well.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Oh, you *do* remember that, Mr. Weller. I thought we should get at something at last.

SAM WELLER

I raythor thought that, too, sir. [*The Spectators laugh.*

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Well; I suppose you went up to have a little talk about this trial — eh, Mr. Weller? [*Looks at the Jury knowingly.*

SAM WELLER

I went up to pay the rent; but we *did* get a talkin' about the trial.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Oh, you did get a talking about the trial. Now what passed about the trial? Will you have the goodness to tell us, Mr. Weller?

SAM WELLER

Vith all the pleasure in life, sir. Arter a few unimportant observations from the two wirtuous females as has been examined here to-day, the ladies gets into a very great state o' admiration at the honorable conduct of Mr. Dodson and Fogg — them two gen'l'men as is settin' near you now.

[*People look at Dodson and Fogg, who, conscious of the fact, look as virtuous as possible.*

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

The attorneys for the plaintiff. Well! they spoke in high praise of the honorable conduct of Messrs. Dodson and Fogg, the attorneys for the plaintiff, did they?

SAM WELLER

Yes, they said what a werry generous thing it was o' them to have taken up the case on spec, and to charge nothing at all for costs, unless they got 'em out of Mr. Pickwick.

[*The Spectators laugh, and Messrs. Dodson and Fogg in much confusion whisper to Sergeant Buzfuz.*

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

You are quite right. It 's perfectly useless, my lord, attempting to get at any evidence through the impenetrable stupidity of this witness. I will not trouble the court by asking him any more questions. Stand down, sir.

SAM WELLER

[*Taking up his hat, and looking round deliberately*] Would any other gen'l'man like to ask me anythin' ?

SERGEANT SNUBBIN

[*Laughing*] Not I, Mr. Weller, thank you.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

[*Waving his hand impatiently*] You may go down, sir.

SERGEANT SNUBBIN

I have no objection to admitting, my lord, if it will save the examination of another witness, that Mr. Pickwick has retired from business, and is a gentleman of considerable independent property.

SERGEANT BUZFUZ

Very well. Then that 's my case, my lord.

[*Sergeant Snubbin rises, arranges his papers before him, and adjusts his glasses.*

SERGEANT SNUBBIN

Gentlemen of the jury, I have the honor to address you in behalf of the defendant, Mr. Pickwick. I will remind you, in the first place, that this gentleman bears an unexceptionable character, so far above the ordinary, indeed, as to be at once

a sufficient denial of the absurd charge which is brought against him. The absurdity of this charge, indeed, is so manifest that I cannot imagine its being believed for a moment by a company of sincere, intelligent jurymen. I shall not further tax the patience of the jury by bringing witnesses to prove the high merits of Mr. Pickwick. It would be easy to do so, but I forbear. Sufficient to say that his name is untarnished by a single act that could accuse him of falsehood, of treachery, of cruelty. The charge brought against him fades into thin air before the solid and enduring worth of his character.

It does not rest with me, gentlemen of the jury, to prove my client innocent; it rests with the opposing counsel to prove him guilty. Fix your minds upon that thought. From the doubtful testimony you have heard, the vague possibilities suggested, the unheard-of constructions placed upon innocent acts, does my client's guilt appear clear and indisputable to your minds? If not, beware of pronouncing an innocent man guilty!

I have a word to say upon the probabilities in this case; first, on my client's side. Is it natural to suppose, gentlemen, that a man of Mr. Pickwick's age and habits would suddenly decide to change the customs of a lifetime, and take to himself a wife? not only a wife but a son, well grown and active? Mr. Pickwick has not been a lonely man; he has not been an idle man. Leisure he has, it is true, but it is the leisure of the well-informed man, the man of many friends, the student, the traveler. Is it probable, I ask you, that my client should wish, in the evening of his days, to give up the pleasant and blameless enjoyments to which he has grown strongly attached, and in exchange bind himself to new responsibilities of an exacting nature?

Again, granted that Mr. Pickwick had every wish to embark on the sea of matrimony, granted, also, that Mrs. Bardell is a woman of worth and personal charm [*Mrs. Bardell bridles complacently.*], is it probable that my client could have seen in such a union that similarity of social experience, that complete harmony of mind and tastes, that perfect sympathy, which would point to wedded happiness?

On the other hand, look at the probability on the plaintiff's side. In linking her name and fortunes to those of the defendant, she would be entering upon a path of roses. The struggles of her widowed life would be forgotten in the assured prosperity of an ample fortune. And, not to accuse the lady of mercenary motives, I may say that my client has a disposition so lovable, a courtesy so uniform, that it is no disgrace to any woman to feel, after two years' acquaintance, a warm and sincere attachment for such a man. [*Mrs. Bardell sobs aloud.*] Gentlemen, it has been said, with striking truth, that the wish is father to the thought. I ask you to give this familiar saying your attention. Ponder it well, and see if you do not perceive its bearing upon this case.

We have heard in this trial much concerning chops and tomato sauce. Who would not admire the ingenuity which rears a towering structure from such unpromising materials! My client's innocent letter giving orders for dinner is tortured into a construction quite foreign to that intended. A commonplace direction for the preparation of his lodgings is supposed to convey ardent affection. Away with such childish insinuations! Weigh the evidence with unbiased minds, and truth will emerge, unobscured and refulgent, pointing to a complete acquittal for the defendant.

[*Sergeant Snubbin sits down.*

JUDGE

[*Looking over his notebook, and trying with difficulty to decipher his notes as he speaks to the Jury*] You have heard the evidence brought forward by the counsel for the plaintiff; it seems that the defendant has awakened vain hopes in the mind of the plaintiff. He has corresponded with her to some extent, as the letters themselves prove. We are told that it was the current report in the neighborhood that he was engaged to the plaintiff. You have heard the remarks of the counsel for the defendant. He told you that the defendant has previously borne a good character, but for reasons best known to himself he made no attempt to prove this assertion by witnesses.

If Mrs. Bardell is right, it is perfectly clear that Mr. Pickwick is in the wrong; if you think the evidence of Mrs. Cluppins is trustworthy, you will believe it, and if you don't, why, you won't. If you are satisfied that a breach of promise of marriage has been committed, you will find for the plaintiff, with such damages as you think proper. If, on the other hand, it appears to you that no promise of marriage has ever been given, you will find for the defendant, with no damages at all.

[*He goes out at one door; the Jury retire by another. During their brief absence the Spectators whisper to each other. Sam Weller goes to Master Bardell and gazes down at him.*

SAM WELLER

How do you find yourself, young five-and-sixpence? [*Master Bardell scowls unpleasantly.*] You ain't handsome

enough to do that, young feller, not by several sizes. I would n't if I was you. It might bring on the toothache.

[*Sam goes to his father, Tony Weller, who sits among the Spectators. He is a red-faced, corpulent man, dressed like a coachman. They shake hands.*

TONY WELLER

Mornin', Sammy.

SAM WELLER

Mornin', guv'nor. How 's mother-in-law?

TONY WELLER

She 's been uncommon busy lately, and uncommon disagreeable.

SAM WELLER

Why don't you keep her straight? I 'm ashamed on you.

TONY WELLER

Ven you 're a married man, Samivel, you 'll understand a good many things as you don't understand now; but vether it 's worth while goin' through so much, to learn so little, as the boy said ven he got to the end of the alphabet, is a matter o' taste. *I* rayther think it is n't.

SAM WELLER

[*Moving away*] Well, good-by.

TONY WELLER

Goin', Samivel? I 'm afraid them fellers is goin' to pass a werdick.

SAM WELLER

They can't help theirselves. [*Returns to his place.*

[*The Jury soon return. An Usher goes for the Judge. Mr. Pickwick puts on his spectacles and looks at the Foreman.*

CLERK

Gentlemen, are you all agreed upon your verdict?

FOREMAN

We are.

CLERK

Do you find for the plaintiff, gentlemen, or for the defendant?

FOREMAN

For the plaintiff.

CLERK

With what damages, gentlemen?

FOREMAN

Seven hundred and fifty pounds.

[*Mr. Pickwick takes off his spectacles, wipes them, and puts them in the case, then deliberately draws on his gloves. The Spectators and Officers of the court go out, chatting together. Mrs. Bardell and Master Bardell go out together, escorted by Jackson. Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass join Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Perker. As they move toward the door, Mr. Pickwick encounters Dodson and Fogg, rubbing their hands and beaming with satisfaction.*

MR. PICKWICK

Well, gentlemen!

MR. DODSON

Well, sir —

MR. PICKWICK

You imagine you 'll get your costs, don't you, gentlemen?

MR. FOGG

We think it rather probable.

MR. DODSON

[*Smiling*] We 'll try.

MR. PICKWICK

You may try, and try, and try again, Messrs. Dodson and Fogg, but not one farthing of costs or damages do you ever get from me, if I spend the rest of my existence in a debtor's prison.

MR. FOGG

[*Laughing*] We 'll soon see about that, Mr. Pickwick.

[*They make their way out. Just before they reach the door Tony Weller comes from his corner and touches Sam on the shoulder.*

TONY WELLER

[*Shaking his head mournfully*] I know'd what 'ud come o' this here mode o' doin' bisness. Oh Sammy, Sammy, vy worn't there a alleybi?

SCENES FROM NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

DOTHEBOYS HALL

CHARACTERS

Nicholas Nickleby	Belling
Mr. Squeers	Smike
Mr. Snawley	Mrs. Squeers
Ralph Nickleby	Fanny Squeers
John Browdie	Miss Price

Waiter, Boys, Maid

SCENE I

The coffee room of the Saracen's Head in London, furnished with small tables in alcoves. A small boy, Master Belling, perched on a trunk, looks timidly at Mr. Wackford Squeers, who stands by a table with his hands in his pockets. Mr. Squeers wears a patch over one eye. His face is a forbidding one, cunning and cruel. His hair is flat and shiny, brushed up stiffly in front from his low forehead. His voice is harsh, his manner repulsive. He seems about fifty years of age, and wears an ill-fitting black suit, with long white neckerchief. He is in London to get pupils for his school in Yorkshire, Dotheboys Hall, a forlorn place fitly named, where unloved children are sent by those who wish to be rid of them.

Ralph Nickleby is a miser, selfish and hard-hearted. The family of his dead brother look to him for protection, and he brings Nicholas, his nephew, to Squeers, to apply for the position of tutor, seeking thus to further his personal ends.

Nicholas Nickleby is a prepossessing young gentleman of good manners and ability, modest, yet high-spirited, and having fiery courage at need.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Looking at his watch*] Half-past three. There 'll be nobody here to-day. [*Having made this remark in a sulky tone, he turns to Belling, who is sitting perfectly quiet, and cuffs*

him] Don't you do that again. [*Continuing to himself*] At midsummer I took down ten boys; ten twenties is two hundred pound. I go back at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, and have got only three — three aughts is an aught — three twos is six — sixty pound. What 's come of all the boys? What 's parents got in their heads? What does it all mean? [*Belling sneezes.*] Halloo, sir! What 's that?

BELLING

[*Much frightened*] Nothing, please sir.

MR. SQUEERS

Nothing, sir!

BELLING

[*Stammering with fright*] Please, sir, I sneezed.

MR. SQUEERS

Oh! sneezed, did you? Then what did you say "nothing" for? [*Belling puts his arm to his face and begins to cry.*] Will you hold that noise, sir?

BELLING

Ye-ye-yes, sir.

[*Wipes his eyes with a colored handkerchief.*

MR. SQUEERS

Then do so at once, sir. Do you hear?

A Waiter *enters.*

WAITER

Mr. Squeers, there 's a gentleman asking for you at the bar.

MR. SQUEERS

[*In a soft voice*] Show the gentleman in, Richard. [*Whispering fiercely to Belling*] Put your handkerchief in your pocket, you little scoundrel, or I 'll murder you when the gentleman goes.

MR. SNAWLEY *enters, with two small* Boys. MR. SNAWLEY *is a sleek, sanctimonious looking man dressed in black, with long black gaiters. The boys are thin and pale, and have a neglected, unhappy look.* SQUEERS *pretends not to see the visitors, and mends a quill pen as he talks to* BELLING *in gentle tones.*

My dear child, all people have their trials. This early trial of yours that is fit to make your little heart burst, and your very eyes come out of your head with crying, what is it? Nothing; less than nothing. You are leaving your friends, but you will have a father in me, my dear, and a mother in Mrs. Squeers. At the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire, where youth are boarded, clothed, booked, washed, furnished with pocket money, provided with all necessaries —

MR. SNAWLEY

[*Aside*] It *is* the gentleman. [*Addressing Squeers*] Mr. Squeers, I believe, sir?

MR. SQUEERS

The same, sir.

MR. SNAWLEY

The gentleman that advertised in the *Times* newspaper?

MR. SQUEERS

Morning Post, *Chronicle*, *Herald*, and *Advertiser*, regarding the Academy called Dotheboys Hall at the delightful

village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire. You come on business, sir, I see by my young friends. How do you do, my little gentleman, and how do *you* do, sir?

[*Pats the heads of the Boys.*

MR. SNAWLEY

I am in the oil and color way. My name is Snawley, sir. [*Mr. Squeers inclines his head.*] I have been thinking, Mr. Squeers, of placing my two boys at your school.

MR. SQUEERS

It is not for me to say so, sir, but I don't think you could possibly do a better thing.

MR. SNAWLEY

Hem! twenty pounds per annewum, I believe, Mr. Squeers?

MR. SQUEERS

[*Smiling*] Guineas.

MR. SNAWLEY

Pounds for two, I think, Mr. Squeers.

MR. SQUEERS

I don't think it could be done, sir. Let me see; four fives is twenty, double that, and deduct the — well, a pound either way shall not stand betwixt us. You must recommend me to your connection, sir, and make it up that way.

MR. SNAWLEY

They are not great eaters.

MR. SQUEERS

Oh! that does n't matter at all. We don't consider the boys' appetites at our establishment. Every wholesome luxury, sir, that Yorkshire can afford; every beautiful moral that Mrs. Squeers can instill; every — in short, every comfort of a home that a boy could wish for will be theirs, Mr. Snawley.

MR. SNAWLEY

I should wish their morals to be particularly attended to.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Drawing himself up*] I am glad of that, sir. They have come to the right shop for morals, sir.

MR. SNAWLEY

You are a moral man yourself.

MR. SQUEERS

I rather believe I am, sir.

MR. SNAWLEY

I have the satisfaction to know you are, sir. I asked one of your references, and he said you were pious.

MR. SQUEERS

Well, sir, I hope I am a little in that line.

MR. SNAWLEY

I hope I am, also. Could I say a few words with you?

MR. SQUEERS

By all means. My dears, will you speak to your new playfellow a minute or two? Take them out into the passage, Belling, and show them the nice view into the kitchen yard.

[*The three Boys go out timidly.*] That is one of my boys, sir. Belling his name is, a Taunton boy. He goes down with me to-morrow, sir. That trunk is his. Each boy is required to bring two suits of clothes, six shirts, six pairs of stockings, two nightcaps, two handkerchiefs, two pairs of shoes, two hats, and a razor.

MR. SNAWLEY

A razor! What for?

MR. SQUEERS

[*Slowly and deliberately*] To shave with.

[*The two men look at each other a moment, then smile significantly.*

MR. SNAWLEY

Up to what age do you keep boys at your school then?

MR. SQUEERS

Just as long as their friends make the quarterly payments to my agent in town, or until such time as they run away. Let us understand each other; I see we may safely do so. You want to get rid of these boys.

MR. SNAWLEY

Yes; the fact is, I 'm not their father, Mr. Squeers. I 'm only their stepfather. You see I have married the mother; it 's expensive keeping boys at home, and as she has a little money in her own right, I am afraid (women are so very foolish, Mr. Squeers) that she might be led to squander it on them, which would be their ruin, you know.

MR. SQUEERS

I see.

[*Throwing himself back in his chair and waving his hand.*

MR. SNAWLEY

And this has made me anxious to put them to some school a good distance off, where there are no holidays — none of those ill-judged comings home twice a year that unsettle children's minds so — and where they may rough it a little — you comprehend?

MR. SQUEERS

[*Nodding*] The payments regular, and no questions asked.

MR. SNAWLEY

That 's it, exactly. Morals strictly attended to, though.

MR. SQUEERS

Strictly.

MR. SNAWLEY

[*Hesitating*] Not too much writing home allowed, I suppose?

MR. SQUEERS

None, except a circular at Christmas, to say they never were so happy, and hope they may never be sent for.

MR. SNAWLEY

[*Rubbing his hands*] Nothing could be better.

MR. SQUEERS

Then, as we understand each other, will you allow me to ask you whether you consider me a highly virtuous, exemplary, and well-conducted man in private life; and whether, as a person whose business it is to take charge of youth, you place the strongest confidence in my unimpeachable integrity, liberality, religious principles, and ability? [*Smiling.*

MR. SNAWLEY

[*Smiling*] Certainly I do.

MR. SQUEERS

Perhaps you won't object to say that, if I make you a reference?

MR. SNAWLEY

Not the least in the world.

MR. SQUEERS

That's your sort! [*Taking up a pen*] This is doing business, and that's what I like.

[*Mr. Snawley gives the money for the first payment in advance. Mr. Squeers gives the receipt.*

RALPH NICKLEBY

[*Outside*] Where shall I find Mr. Squeers?

MR. SQUEERS

Here he is. What is it?

RALPH NICKLEBY

[*Entering, followed by* NICHOLAS NICKLEBY] Only a matter of business, sir. There was an advertisement of yours in the papers this morning.

MR. SQUEERS

There was, sir. This way, if you please. [*Leads them to a table*] Won't you be seated?

[*Mr. Snawley goes to the passage and brings in the three Boys. Belling sits on his trunk; the others stand near him; all three stare at each other silently, shrug their shoulders, and twist their bodies after the manner of small boys in embarrassment.*

RALPH NICKLEBY

Why, I think I will. This is my nephew, sir, Mr. Nicholas Nickleby.

MR. SQUEERS

How do you do, sir?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Bowing*] I'm very well.

[*Ralph Nickleby, Nicholas Nickleby, and Mr. Squeers sit down at the table, and Ralph Nickleby puts his hat on the table.*

RALPH NICKLEBY

[*Looking intently at Mr. Squeers*] Perhaps you recollect me?

MR. SQUEERS

You paid me a small account at each of my half-yearly visits to town, for some years, I think, sir.

RALPH NICKLEBY

I did.

MR. SQUEERS

For the parents of a boy named Dorker, who unfortunately —

RALPH NICKLEBY

Unfortunately died at Dotheboys Hall.

MR. SQUEERS

I remember very well, sir. Ah! Mrs. Squeers, sir, was as partial to that lad as if he had been her own; the attention, sir, that was bestowed upon that boy in his illness! A candle in his bedroom on the very night he died — the best dictionary sent up for him to lay his head upon — I don't regret it,

though. It is a pleasant thing to reflect that one did one's duty by him.

[*Ralph Nickleby smiles grimly and looks round at Mr. Snawley and the Boys.*

MR. SQUEERS

[*Pointing to the Boys*] These are only some pupils of mine. This gentleman, sir, is a parent who is kind enough to compliment me upon the course of education adopted at Dotheboys Hall, which is situated, sir, at the delightful village of Dotheboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire, where youth are boarded, clothed, booked, washed, furnished with pocket money —

RALPH NICKLEBY

Yes, we know all about that, sir; it 's in the advertisement.

MR. SQUEERS

You are very right, sir; it *is* in the advertisement.

MR. SNAWLEY

And in the matter of fact, besides. I feel bound to assure you, sir, and I am proud to have this opportunity *of* assuring you, that I consider Mr. Squeers a gentleman highly virtuous, exemplary, well-conducted, and —

RALPH NICKLEBY

I make no doubt of it, sir; no doubt of it at all. Suppose we come to business?

MR. SQUEERS

With all my heart, sir. "Never postpone business" is the very first lesson we instill into our commercial pupils. Master Belling, my dear, always remember that; do you hear?

BELLING

Yes, sir.

RALPH NICKLEBY

He recollects what it is, does he?

MR. SQUEERS

Tell the gentleman.

BELLING

Never —

MR. SQUEERS

Very good, go on.

BELLING

Never —

MR. SQUEERS

Very good indeed; yes.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

P—

BELLING

Perform — business! Never — perform — business!

MR. SQUEERS

[*With a withering look at Belling*] Very well, sir; you and I will perform a little business on our private account by and by.

RALPH NICKLEBY

[*Sarcastically*] And just now, we had better transact our own, perhaps.

MR. SQUEERS

If you please.

RALPH NICKLEBY

Well, it 's brief enough; soon broached, and I hope easily concluded. You have advertised for an able assistant, sir?

MR. SQUEERS

Precisely so.

RALPH NICKLEBY

And you really want one?

MR. SQUEERS

Certainly.

RALPH NICKLEBY

Here he is! My nephew Nicholas, hot from school, with everything he learnt there fermenting in his head, and nothing fermenting in his pocket, is just the man you want.

MR. SQUEERS

I am afraid the young man won't suit me.

RALPH NICKLEBY

Yes, he will; I know better. [*To Nicholas*] Don't be cast down, sir; you will be teaching all the young noblemen in Dotheboys Hall in less than a week's time, unless this gentleman is more obstinate than I take him to be.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Addressing Squeers*] I fear, sir, that you object to my youth, and to my not being a Master of Arts?

MR. SQUEERS

The absence of a college degree *is* an objection.

RALPH NICKLEBY

Look here, sir; I'll put this matter in its true light in two seconds.

MR. SQUEERS

If you 'll have the goodness.

RALPH NICKLEBY

This is a boy, or a youth, or a lad, or whatever you like to call him, of eighteen or nineteen, or thereabouts.

MR. SQUEERS

That I see.

MR. SNAWLEY

So do I.

RALPH NICKLEBY

His father is dead; he is wholly ignorant of the world, has no resources whatever, and wants something to do. I recommend him to this splendid establishment of yours as an opening which will lead him to fortune if he turns it to proper account. Do you see that? [*Sneeringly.*

MR. SQUEERS

Everybody must see that.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Eagerly*] *I* do of course.

RALPH NICKLEBY

He does, of course, you observe. [*In a hard, dry tone*] If any caprice of temper should induce him to cast aside this golden opportunity before he has brought it to perfection, I consider myself absolved from extending any assistance to his mother and sister. Look at him, and think of the use he may be to you in half a dozen ways! Now, the question is, whether, for some time to come at all events, he won't serve your purpose better than twenty of the kind of people you would get under ordinary circumstances. Is n't that a question for consideration? [*Nodding.*

MR. SQUEERS

[*With an answering nod*] Yes, it is.

RALPH NICKLEBY

Good. Let me have two words with you.

[*He and Mr. Squeers whisper apart a moment.*

MR. SQUEERS

From this moment Mr. Nicholas Nickleby is installed as first assistant master at Dotheboys Hall. Your uncle's recommendation has done it, Mr. Nickleby.

[*Nicholas in the fullness of his joy shakes his uncle's hand warmly.*

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I thank you, Mr. Squeers, with all my heart.

MR. SQUEERS

At eight o'clock to-morrow morning, Mr. Nickleby, the coach starts. You must be here at a quarter before, as we take these boys with us.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Certainly, sir.

RALPH NICKLEBY

[*Gruffly*] And your fare down, I have paid; so you 'll have nothing to do but keep yourself warm.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

How can I thank you enough!

RALPH NICKLEBY

I shall be here in the morning to see you fairly off. No skulking!

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I never shall forget this kindness.

RALPH NICKLEBY

Take care you don't. You had better go home now and pack up what you have got to pack.

[*Ralph Nickleby and Nicholas Nickleby take leave of Mr. Squeers and go out.*

SCENE II

The sitting room of MR. and MRS. SQUEERS at Dotheboys Hall, the morning after the arrival of NICHOLAS. His own room not being ready, NICHOLAS has spent the night in this room on an improvised couch on the floor. He is brushing his coat when SQUEERS enters.

MR. SQUEERS

Here 's a pretty go! The pump 's froze.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Indeed!

MR. SQUEERS

Yes; you can't wash yourself this morning.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Not wash myself!

MR. SQUEERS

[*Tartly*] No, not a bit of it. So you must be content with giving yourself a dry polish till we break the ice in the well, and can get a bucketful out for the boys. Don't stand staring at me, but do look sharp, will you?

[*Nicholas puts on his coat.*

MRS. SQUEERS

[*Outside*] Can I come in, Squeery?

MR. SQUEERS

Come in, my love.

MRS. SQUEERS *enters. She is half a head taller than* MR. SQUEERS, *and wears a dimity sack; her hair is in curl papers, and she wears a nightcap tied with a yellow handkerchief under her chin. An old beaver bonnet is perched on the top of the nightcap. She goes to a cupboard.*

MRS. SQUEERS

Drat the things. I can't find the school spoon anywhere.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Soothingly*] Never mind it, my dear; it 's of no consequence.

MRS. SQUEERS

No consequence! why, how you talk! Is n't it brimstone morning?

MR. SQUEERS

I forgot, my dear. Yes, it certainly is. We purify the boys' bloods now and then, Nickleby.

MRS. SQUEERS

Purify fiddlesticks' ends! Don't think, young man, that we go to the expense of flower of brimstone and molasses, just to purify them; because if you think we carry on the business in that way, you 'll find yourself mistaken, and so I tell you plainly.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Frowning*] Hem! My dear!

MRS. SQUEERS

Oh, nonsense! If the young man comes to be a teacher here, let him understand, at once, that we don't want any foolery about the boys. They have the brimstone and treacle, partly because if they had n't something or other in the way of medicine, they 'd be always ailing and giving a world of trouble; and partly because it spoils their appetites and comes cheaper than breakfast and dinner. So, it does them good and us good at the same time, and that 's fair enough, I 'm sure.

[*Continues to look for the spoon, and Mr. Squeers assists in the search.*

MR. SQUEERS

Perhaps Smike has seen it.

MRS. SQUEERS

[*Going to the door*] Smike! Come here.

SMIKE *enters. He is a pitiful figure; eighteen or nineteen, and tall for that age, but wasted and hopeless. His clothes are much too short in the arms and legs; he wears an old pair of boots.*

MR. SQUEERS

Where 's the spoon, Smike?

[*They hustle him, and push him about.*

MRS. SQUEERS

Why don't you speak? Where is it?

SMIKE

Perhaps you have it in your pocket.

MRS. SQUEERS

Did n't I say I had n't got it? How dare you be so disrespectful! You deserve a sound thrashing. [*She turns half*

round, feels in her pocket, and draws the spoon forth] Come along, Smike! Come along.

[*Hurries out, pushing Smike before her.*

MR. SQUEERS

A most invaluable woman, that, Nickleby.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Indeed, sir!

MR. SQUEERS

I don't know her equal. That woman, Nickleby, is always the same — always the same bustling, lively, active, saving creetur that you see her now. It 's my way to say, when I am up in London, that to them boys she is a mother. But she is more than a mother to them; ten times more. She does things for them boys, Nickleby, that I don't believe half the mothers going would do for their own sons.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I should think they would not, sir.

MR. SQUEERS

Come, let 's go to the schoolroom. [*They go out.*

SCENE III

The schoolroom. Two long old desks extend across the floor, with benches behind them. In front are two desks, at which sit SQUEERS and NICHOLAS. The Boys, neglected and forlorn, pale, emaciated, in grotesque and ill-fitting clothing, are seated at the desks. The Boys who arrived the night before are huddled together in a corner, in garments much too large or too small for them. SMIKE is fitting a new pair of boots on MASTER SQUEERS, who kicks and struggles. BELLING regards the process with rueful amazement. On one of the desks is an immense

basin of brimstone and treacle, from which MRS. SQUEERS is administering a quantity to the Boys in turn, with a large wooden spoon. Some of the Boys stand waiting their turn with strong reluctance; as they go to their seats after receiving their portion, they make wry faces.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Rapping the desk loudly with his cane, so that the smaller Boys jump visibly*] Now, is that physicking over?

MRS. SQUEERS

Just over. [*Chokes the last Boy in her hurry and taps the crown of his head with the spoon to restore him*] Here, you Smike; take away now. Look sharp! Help me bring in the breakfast.

[*Smike carries the basin out. Mrs. Squeers follows. They soon return, Mrs. Squeers bringing a number of little wooden bowls and some bread in a basket, Smike bringing a kettle of porridge. During their absence Master Squeers amuses himself by treading on the other Boys' toes. The Boys wince and cry out. Mr. Squeers goes out after Mrs. Squeers returns, to get his own breakfast, of a different sort. Nicholas remains and is given a slice of bread and butter besides the porridge. The Boys sit at the desks and are served with porridge and bread, which they eat silently. Mrs. Squeers stands or walks to and fro before the Boys, watching them as they eat.*

BELLING

Please, I have n't any spoon.

MRS. SQUEERS

Well, of all the unreasonable boys I ever heard of, if you ain't the worst! What do you suppose your bread is for? Do you think I 'm going to buy spoons for a lot of greedy boys, and spend my precious time washing 'em three times a day? Eat your porridge with your bread, and be thankful for it. [*To Bolder*] Don't hurry so, Bolder. You know you 'll not get anything more till dinner time. [*To Nickleby*] Mr. Nickleby, these boys are never satisfied. You 'll know them better by and by.

NICHOLAS

[*Bowing politely*] I hope I shall.

MRS. SQUEERS

Here, Smike, clear away. We can't be eating all day. There are some people that have nothing to do but gratify their appetites. *I* have work to do.

[*Bustles about and assists Smike to clear the dishes away. After a few moments, during which Master Squeers again makes himself disagreeable, treading on the Boys' toes, pulling hair and pinching, Mr. Squeers returns, wiping his mouth, and brushing crumbs from his clothes.*

MR. SQUEERS

First class take places. Quick now, be spry. [*Half a dozen ragged Boys stand before his desk. One places a torn, dirty book on his desk. Squeers beckons Nicholas to stand beside him*] This is the first class in English spelling and philosophy, Nickleby. We 'll get up a Latin one, and hand that over to you. Now, then, where 's the first boy?

A BOY

Please, sir, he 's cleaning the back parlor window.

MR. SQUEERS

So he is, to be sure. We go upon the practical mode of teaching, Nickleby; the regular education system. C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour. W-i-n, win, d-e-r, der, winder, a casement. When the boy knows this out of the book, he goes and does it. It 's just the same principle as the use of the globes. Where 's the second boy?

A BOY

Please, sir, he 's weeding the garden.

MR. SQUEERS

To be sure; so he is. B-o-t, bot, t-i-n, tin, bottin, n-e-y, ney, bottinney, noun substantive, a knowledge of plants. When he has learned that bottinney means a knowledge of plants, he goes and knows 'em. That 's our system, Nickleby; what do you think of it?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

It 's a very useful one, at any rate.

MR. SQUEERS

I believe you. Third boy, what 's a horse?

THIRD BOY

A beast, sir.

MR. SQUEERS

So it is; ain't it, Nickleby?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I believe there is no doubt of that, sir.

MR. SQUEERS

Of course there is n't. A horse is a quadruped, and quadruped 's Latin for " beast," as everybody that 's gone through the grammar knows, or else where 's the use of having grammars at all ?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Where, indeed !

MR. SQUEERS

[*To the Boy*] As you 're perfect in that, go and look after *my* horse, and rub him down well, or I 'll rub you down. The rest of the class go and draw water, till somebody tells you to leave off, for it 's washing day to-morrow, and they want the coppers filled. [*The Boys of the class go out.*] That 's the way we do it, Nickleby.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*With an almost imperceptible shrug*] I see it is.

MR. SQUEERS

And a very good way it is, too. After dinner you must take them fourteen little boys and hear them some reading, because, you know, you must begin to be useful. Idling about here won't do.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I expect to make myself useful.

MRS. SQUEERS *enters, and sits by* MR. SQUEERS.

MR. SQUEERS

I 'm glad to hear it. Now, boys, I 'm going to tell you about my visit, according to custom. I 've been to London, and have returned to my family and you, as strong and well as ever. [*The Boys give three very feeble cheers.*] I have

seen the parents of some boys, and they 're so glad to hear how their sons are getting on, that there 's no prospect at all of their going away, which of course is a very pleasant thing to reflect upon, for all parties. [*Some of the Boys put their hands to their eyes.*] Now let us see. A letter for Cobbey. Stand up, Cobbey. [*A Boy stands up and looks wistfully at the letter. Mr. Squeers opens it*] Oh! Cobbey's grandmother is dead, and his Uncle John has took to drinking, which is all the news his sister sends, except eighteenpence, which will just pay for that broken square of glass. [*To Mrs. Squeers*] Mrs. Squeers, my dear, will you take the money? [*Mrs. Squeers takes it and puts it in her pocket. Mr. Squeers opens another letter*] Mobbs's stepmother took to her bed on hearing that he would n't eat fat, and has been very ill ever since. She has stopped his halfpenny a week pocket money, and given to the missionaries a double-bladed knife with a cockscrew in it, which she had bought on purpose for him. She sent a cap, but Mrs. Squeers found it was too large, just the size for Master Squeers. [*Opens other letters and reads a sentence here and there*] Gammon's aunt sent two pair of stockings.

MRS. SQUEERS

Entirely too small for Gammon. They happen to fit Master Squeers, which is lucky, so they won't be wasted.

MR. SQUEERS

A hat for Whittle. Whittle needs a hat, and I hope it fits him. What do you think, my dear?

MRS. SQUEERS

It 's a mile too big. I think Wackford can wear it.

MR. SQUEERS

Here 's a letter for Dorker. A little money in it, Dorker. You 'd like Mrs. Squeers to take care of it for you, I know. [*Hands it to Mrs. Squeers*] Well, I believe that 's all this time. [*Picks up the letters and puts them in his pocket. Mrs. Squeers goes out.*] You may go now, boys. Be on time this afternoon.

[*Goes out, and the Boys follow, with the exception of Smike, who lingers near Nicholas, picking up scraps of paper thrown down by Mr. Squeers. Looking up to steal a look at Nicholas, sitting at his desk, Smike catches his eye, and shrinks back as if expecting a blow.*

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Kindly*] You need not fear me. Are you cold?

SMIKE

N-n-o.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

You are shivering.

SMIKE

I am not cold; I am used to it.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Poor fellow!

SMIKE

[*Bursting into tears, covering his face with his hands*] Oh dear, oh dear! My heart will break. It will, it will.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Laying his hand on Smike's shoulder*] Hush! Be a man; you are nearly one by years, God help you.

SMIKE

By years! Oh, dear, dear, how many of them! How many of them since I was a little child, younger than any that are here now! Where are they all?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Whom do you speak of? Tell me.

SMIKE

My friends, myself — my — oh! what sufferings mine have been!

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

There is always hope.

SMIKE

No, no; none for me. Do you remember the boy that died here?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I was not here, you know; but what of him?

SMIKE

[*Drawing closer to Nicholas*] I was with him at night, and when it was all silent he cried no more for friends he wished to come and sit with him, but began to see faces round his bed, faces from home. He said they smiled and talked to him. Do you hear?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Yes, yes.

SMIKE

What faces will smile on me? Who will talk to me in those long nights? Pain and fear, pain and fear for me, alive or dead. No hope, no hope! [*Goes out; Nicholas follows.*

SCENE IV

MR. SQUEERS'S sitting room. MISS FANNY SQUEERS, the schoolmaster's daughter, has just returned from a visit. MRS. SQUEERS is darning stockings. FANNY SQUEERS and her brother WACKFORD are quarreling and slapping each other across the table, when MR. SQUEERS enters.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Drawing his chair up to the table*] Well, my dear, what do you think of him by this time?

MRS. SQUEERS

Think of who?

MR. SQUEERS

Of the young man — the new teacher — who else could I mean?

MRS. SQUEERS

Oh! that Knuckleboy! [*Impatiently*] I hate him.

MR. SQUEERS

What do you hate him for, my dear?

MRS. SQUEERS

What 's that to you? If I hate him, that 's enough, ain't it?

MR. SQUEERS

[*Soothingly*] Quite enough for him, my dear, and a great deal too much, I dare say, if he knew it. I only asked from curiosity, my dear.

MRS. SQUEERS

Well, then, if you want to know, I 'll tell you. Because he 's a proud, haughty, consequential, turned-up-nosed peacock.

MR. SQUEERS

Hem! He is cheap, my dear; the young man is very cheap.

MRS. SQUEERS

Not a bit of it.

MR. SQUEERS

Five pound a year.

MRS. SQUEERS

What of that? It 's dear if you don't want him, is n't it?

MR. SQUEERS

But we *do* want him.

MRS. SQUEERS

I don't see that you want him any more than the dead. Don't tell me. You can put on the cards and in the advertisements, "Education by Mr. Wackford Squeers and able assistants," without having any assistants, can't you? Is n't it done every day by all the masters about? I 've no patience with you.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Sternly*] Have n't you! Now I 'll tell you what, Mrs. Squeers. In this matter of having a teacher, I 'll take my own way, if you please, until such time as little Wackford is able to take charge of the school.

MASTER SQUEERS

Am I to take care of the school when I grow up a man, father?

MR. SQUEERS

You are, my son.

MASTER SQUEERS

Oh, my eye! Won't I give it to the boys? [*Grasps his father's cane*] Oh, father, won't I make 'em squeak again!

MRS. SQUEERS

He 's a nasty, stuck-up monkey; that 's what I consider him.

MR. SQUEERS

Supposing he is. He is as well stuck up in our schoolroom as anywhere else, is n't he? — especially as he don't like it.

MRS. SQUEERS

Well, there 's something in that. I hope it 'll bring his pride down, and it shall be no fault of mine if it does n't.

MISS SQUEERS

Pa, who is this Knuckleboy that gives himself such airs?

MR. SQUEERS

N-i-k, Nick, k-e-l, kle, Nickle, b-y, by, Nickleby. Your mother always calls things and people by their wrong names.

MRS. SQUEERS

No matter for that. I see them with right eyes, and that 's quite enough for me. I watched him to-day when you were caning one of the boys. He looked as black as thunder, all the while, and, one time, started up as if he 'd more than got it in his mind to make a rush at you. *I* saw him, though he thought I did n't.

MISS SQUEERS

Never mind that, father. Who is the man?

MRS. SQUEERS

Why, your father has got some nonsense in his head that he 's the son of a poor gentleman that died the other day.

MISS SQUEERS

The son of a gentleman!

MRS. SQUEERS

I don't believe a word of it. I say again, I hate him worse than poison.

MR. SQUEERS

If you dislike him, my dear, I don't know anybody who can show dislike better than you, and of course there 's no occasion, with him, to take the trouble to hide it.

MRS. SQUEERS

I don't intend to, I assure you.

MR. SQUEERS

That 's right; and if he has a touch of pride about him, as I think he has, I don't believe there 's a woman in all England that can bring anybody's spirit down as quick as you can, my love.

MRS. SQUEERS

I hope I have tamed a high spirit or two in my day.

MR. SQUEERS

Yes, my dear; you 're a master hand at that business.

SCENE V

The sitting room of the SQUEERS family. MISS SQUEERS has seen enough of NICHOLAS to feel a violent admiration for him, and, to further the acquaintance, has invited him to a tea party on an evening when her parents are away. The other guests are her bosom friend, 'TILDA PRICE, and JOHN BROWDIE, a Yorkshire countryman engaged to MISS PRICE.

MISS SQUEERS has her hair curled in five distinct rows, arranged low over one eye to conceal a squint. She wears a blue sash tied behind

with long ends, a worked apron, and a green gauze scarf, over one shoulder and under the other. MISS PRICE is younger and prettier than MISS SQUEERS, and dressed more becomingly. Both the ladies wear long gloves, and are sitting in state waiting for the gentlemen.

MISS SQUEERS

Where 's John, 'Tilda ?

MISS PRICE

Only gone home to clean himself. He 'll be here by the time the tea 's drawn.

MISS SQUEERS

I do so palpitate !

[*Lays her hand on the left side of her sash.*

MISS PRICE

You 'll soon get the better of it, dear.

A pinched, hungry-looking Maid *brings in the tea things. A knock is heard.*

MISS SQUEERS

There he is ! O 'Tilda !

MISS PRICE

Hush ! Say " Come in."

MISS SQUEERS

[*Faintly*] Come in.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Entering*] Good evening. I understood from Mr. Squeers that —

MISS SQUEERS

Oh, yes ; it 's all right. Father don't tea with us, but [*Archly*] you won't mind that, I dare say. Let me make

you acquainted with Miss Price. 'Tilda, Mr. Nickleby. We are only waiting for one more gentleman.

[*Takes off the teapot lid and looks in. Nicholas sits down, unconcernedly, and sighs, seeming slightly bored.*

MISS PRICE

Dear me! what low spirits you're both in, to be sure! But if it's caused by my being here, don't mind me a bit, for I'm quite as bad. You may go on just as you would if you were alone.

MISS SQUEERS

'Tilda, I'm ashamed of you.

[*The two girls giggle behind their handkerchiefs, glancing at Nicholas, who becomes more and more amused. Soon he bursts out laughing violently and begins to be gay and gallant. A knock is heard, and* JOHN BROWDIE *enters. He is tall and broad shouldered. His hair is damp from recent washing, and he wears a white waistcoat and an immense shirt collar.*

MISS PRICE

Well, John?

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Grinning delightedly*] Weel?

MISS SQUEERS

I beg your pardon. Mr. Nickleby — Mr. John Browdie.

JOHN BROWDIE

Servant, sir.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Yours to command, sir.

[*They sit down at the table and begin to eat.*

JOHN BROWDIE

Old wooman awa', bean't she?

[*Miss Squeers nods. Nicholas and Browdie make great inroads on the bread and butter.*

JOHN BROWDIE

Ye wean't get bread and butther ev'ry neight, I expect, mun. [*Laughing*] Ecod, they dean't put too much intiv 'em. Ye 'll be nowt but skeen and boans if you stop here long eneaf. Ho! ho! ho!

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Scornfully*] You are facetious, sir.

JOHN BROWDIE

Na; I dean't know, but t' oother teacher he wur a lean 'un, he wur.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Angrily*] I don't know whether your perceptions are quite keen enough, Mr. Browdie, to enable you to understand that your remarks are offensive, but if they are, have the goodness to —

MISS PRICE

[*Stopping Browdie's mouth with her hand*] If you say another word, John, only half a word, I 'll never forgive you, or speak to you again.

JOHN BROWDIE

Weel, my lass, I dean't care aboot 'un. Let 'un gang on; let 'un gang on.

MISS SQUEERS

Oh, Mr. Nickleby, don't you go and get mad with John. Cause you must n't, you know.

[*The men shake hands across the table with much gravity. Miss Squeers is overcome and bursts into tears.*

MISS PRICE

What 's the matter, Fanny?

MISS SQUEERS

[*Sobbing*] Nothing, 'Tilda.

MISS PRICE

There never was any danger, was there, Mr. Nickleby?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

None at all. Absurd.

MISS PRICE

[*In a whisper*] That 's right; say something kind to her, and she 'll soon come round. Here! shall John and I go into the kitchen and come back presently?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Not on any account. What on earth should you do that for?

MISS PRICE

[*Beckoning him aside*] Well, you *are* a one to keep company.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

What do you mean? I am not a one to keep company at all — here, at all events. I can't make this out.

MISS PRICE

No, nor I either; but men are always fickle, and always were, and always will be. That I can make out very easily.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Fickle! What do you suppose? You don't mean to say that you think —

MISS PRICE

Oh, no, I think nothing at all. [*Pettishly*] Look at her, dressed so beautiful and looking so well — really *almost* handsome. I am ashamed of you.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

My dear girl, what have I got to do with her dressing beautifully or looking well?

MISS PRICE

Come, don't call me a dear girl, or Fanny will be saying it 's my fault. [*Aloud*] Come; we 're going to have a game at cards.

[*During this conversation, carried on in an undertone by Nicholas and Miss Price at the end of the room, the tea things have been cleared away, and the table set for cards.*

MISS SQUEERS

There are only four of us, 'Tilda; we 'll play speculation, and we had better go partners, two against two.

[*Looks at Nicholas.*

MISS PRICE

What do you say, Mr. Nickleby?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

With all the pleasure in life. Will you be my partner, Miss Price? [*Puts her cards in the same pile with his.*

MISS SQUEERS

[*Hysterically*] Mr. Browdie, shall we make a bank against them?

JOHN BROWDIE

Yes, if ye loike.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Dealing*] We intend to win everything. [*They play.*

MISS SQUEERS

'Tilda *has* won something she did n't expect, I think, have n't you, dear?

MISS PRICE

Only a dozen and eight, love.

MISS SQUEERS

How dull you are to-night!

MISS PRICE

No, indeed. I am in excellent spirits. I was thinking *you* seemed out of sorts.

MISS SQUEERS

Me! Oh, no!

MISS PRICE

That 's well. Your hair 's coming out of curl, dear.

MISS SQUEERS

Never mind me; you had better attend to your partner.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Thank you for reminding her. So she had.

[*John Browdie flattens his nose with his clenched fist grimly. Miss Squeers tosses her head with indignation and sets her curls shaking.*

MISS PRICE

I never had such luck, really. It 's all along of you, Mr. Nickleby, I think. I should like to have you for a partner always.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I wish you had.

MISS PRICE

You 'll have a bad wife, though, if you always win at cards.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Not if your wish is gratified. I am sure I shall have a good one in that case. [*Deals again*] We have all the talking to ourselves, it seems.

MISS SQUEERS

You do it so well, that it would be a pity to interrupt, would n't it, Mr. Browdie? He! he! he!

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Nay, we do it in default of having anybody else to talk to.

MISS PRICE

We 'll talk to you, you know, if you 'll say anything.

MISS SQUEERS

Thank you, 'Tilda, dear.

MISS PRICE

Or you can talk to each other, if you don't choose to talk to us. John, why don't you say something?

JOHN BROWDIE

Say summat?

MISS PRICE

Ay, and not sit there so silent and glum.

JOHN BROWDIE

Weel, then! [*Striking the table with his fist*] What I say 's this — Dang my boans and boddy, if I stan' this ony longer. Do ye gang whoam wi' me, and do yon loight an' toight young whipster look sharp out for a brokken head next time he comes under my hond.

MISS PRICE

Mercy on us! What 's all this?

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Sternly*] Cum whoam, tell 'e, cum whoam.

[*Miss Squeers bursts into tears.*

MISS PRICE

Why, and here 's Fanny in tears now! What can be the matter?

MISS SQUEERS

Oh! you don't know, Miss, of course you don't know. Pray don't trouble yourself to inquire. [*Makes a face.*

MISS PRICE

Well, I 'm sure!

MISS SQUEERS

And who cares whether you are sure or not, ma'am?

[*Makes another grimace.*

MISS PRICE

You are monstrous polite, ma'am.

MISS SQUEERS

I shall not come to you to take lessons in the art, ma'am!

MISS PRICE

You need n't take the trouble to make yourself plainer than you are, ma'am, however, for that 's quite unnecessary.

MISS SQUEERS

I 'm thankful I have n't the bold faces of some people.

MISS PRICE

And I 'm glad I 'm not so envious as some other people.

MISS SQUEERS

You never know what you 'll get if you have anything to do with low persons.

MISS PRICE

That 's very true indeed. I 've thought so a long time.

MISS SQUEERS

'Tilda, I hate you.

MISS PRICE

There 's no love lost between us, I assure you. You 'll cry your eyes out when I 'm gone; you know you will.

MISS SQUEERS

I scorn your words, minx.

MISS PRICE

[*Curtsying low*] You pay me a great compliment when you say so. Wish you a very good night, ma'am, and pleasant dreams attend your sleep!

SCENE VI

The parlor at Dotheboys Hall. It is the day after the tea party, and MISS PRICE has come to call on MISS SQUEERS. Quarrels between the two ladies are rather frequent, and they find no difficulty in speedy reconciliation.

MAID

[*Ushering* MISS PRICE *into the parlor*] Take a seat, mum; I 'll speak to Miss Squeers, and she 'll be down directly.

[*Goes out.*

MISS SQUEERS *enters.*

MISS PRICE

Well, Fanny, you see I have come to see you, although we *had* some words last night.

MISS SQUEERS

I pity your bad passions, 'Tilda, but I bear no malice. I am above it.

MISS PRICE

Don't be cross, Fanny, I have come to tell you something that I know will please you.

MISS SQUEERS

What may that be, 'Tilda?

MISS PRICE

This. After we left here last night, John and I had a dreadful quarrel.

MISS SQUEERS

That does n't please me. [*Smiling.*

MISS PRICE

Dear me! I would n't think so bad of you as to suppose it did. That 's not it.

MISS SQUEERS

[*Gloomily*] Oh! Go on.

MISS PRICE

After a great deal of wrangling, and saying we would never see each other any more, we made it up, and this morning John went and wrote our names down to be put up, for the first time, next Sunday; so we shall be married in three weeks, and I give you notice to get your frock made.

MISS SQUEERS

You don't mean it.

MISS PRICE

Yes I do. If you don't believe me, ask John.

MISS SQUEERS

Well, 'Tilda, I 'll get my frock made, and I hope you may be happy, and yet I don't know; I would n't have you build too much upon it. Men are strange creatures, and many married women wish themselves single again with all their hearts.

MISS PRICE

But come now, Fanny, I want to have a word or two with you about young Mr. Nickleby.

MISS SQUEERS

[*Hysterically*] He is nothing to me. I despise him too much!

MISS PRICE

Oh, you don't mean that, I am sure! Confess, Fanny, don't you like him now?

MISS SQUEERS

[*Shedding tears of spite and mortification*] I'm a wretched, neglected, miserable castaway! I hate everybody, and I wish everybody was dead — that I do.

MISS PRICE

Dear, dear! You are not serious, I am sure.

MISS SQUEERS

[*Clenching her teeth and tying her handkerchief into knots*] And I wish *I* was dead too. There!

MISS PRICE

Oh! You 'll think very differently in another five minutes. How much better to take him into favor again, than to hurt yourself by going on in that way! Would n't it be much nicer now, to have him all to yourself on good terms, in a company-keeping, love-making, pleasant sort of manner?

MISS SQUEERS

I don't know but what it would. Oh! 'Tilda, how could you have acted so mean and dishonorable! I would n't have believed it of you, if anybody had told me.

MISS PRICE

Heyday! One would suppose I had been murdering somebody at least.

MISS SQUEERS

Very nigh as bad.

MISS PRICE

And all this, because I happen to have enough of good looks to make people civil to me. Persons don't make their own faces, and it 's no more my fault if mine is a good one than it is other people's fault if theirs is a bad one.

MISS SQUEERS

Hold your tongue, or you 'll make me slap you, 'Tilda, and afterwards I should be sorry for it!

MISS PRICE

[*Bursting into tears*] I never thought anybody would speak to me like that.

MISS SQUEERS

How could you do it, 'Tilda? [*Weeping violently.*

MISS PRICE

I 'm sure I did n't mean to hurt your feelings, 'Tilda.

MISS SQUEERS

What made you, then?

MISS PRICE

Don't lay it up against me, Fanny.

MISS SQUEERS

Come here, 'Tilda. [*They embrace, wiping their eyes meanwhile.*] My friend forever!

MISS PRICE

Forever and ever, Fanny.

MISS SQUEERS

And you won't try to cut me out again?

MISS PRICE

Never!

[*They rock back and forth in each other's arms.*

MISS SQUEERS

'Tilda, I 'll walk part way home with you.

MISS PRICE

Do, Fanny. I should be delighted.

MISS SQUEERS

[*Calling at the door*] Phib, bring me my things. I 'm going for a walk.

A Maid *enters bringing a shawl and a brown beaver bonnet with green veil attached. As* MISS SQUEERS *is tying her bonnet,* NICHOLAS *enters, with a book in his hand.*

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Good morning.

[*Lays the book on a table and turns to leave the room.*

MISS SQUEERS

He is going. I shall choke, 'Tilda.

MISS PRICE

Come back, Mr. Nickleby, do! Come back, Mr. Nickleby!

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Turning in confusion*] Have you any commands for me, ladies?

MISS PRICE

Don't stop to talk, but support her on the other side. How do you feel now, dear?

MISS SQUEERS

Better. [*Lays her head on Mr. Nickleby's shoulder*] This foolish faintness!

MISS PRICE

Don't call it foolish, dear; you have no reason to be ashamed of it. It 's those who are too proud to come round again, without all this to-do, that ought to be ashamed.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Smiling*] You are resolved to fix it upon me, I see, although I told you last night it was not my fault.

MISS PRICE

There! He says it was not his fault, my dear. Perhaps you were too jealous, or too hasty with him. He says it was not his fault. You hear; I think that 's apology enough.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

You will not understand me. Pray dispense with this jesting, for I have no time, and really no inclination, to be the subject or promoter of mirth just now.

MISS PRICE

What do you mean?

MISS SQUEERS

Don't ask him, 'Tilda, I forgive him.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Dear me! This is more serious than I supposed. Allow me! Will you have the goodness to hear me speak? [*Raises the brown bonnet from his shoulder and steps back, out of the reach of Miss Squeers*] I am very sorry — truly and sincerely sorry — for having been the cause of any difference

among you last night. I reproach myself, most bitterly, for having been so unfortunate as to cause the dissension that occurred, although I did so, I assure you, most unwittingly and heedlessly.

MISS PRICE

Well, that 's not all you have to say, surely.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*In confusion*] I fear there is something more; it is a most awkward thing to say — but — the very mention of such a supposition makes one look like a puppy — still — may I ask if that lady supposes that I entertain any — in short, does she think that I am in love with her?

MISS SQUEERS

[*In a whisper, to Miss Price*] Answer for me, dear.

MISS PRICE

Does she think so? Of course she does.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

She does!

MISS PRICE

Certainly.

MISS SQUEERS

If Mr. Nickleby has doubted that, 'Tilda, he may set his mind at rest. His sentiments are recipro —

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Stop! Pray hear me. This is the grossest and wildest delusion, the completest and most signal mistake, that ever human being labored under, or committed. I have scarcely seen the young lady half a dozen times, but if I had seen her

sixty times, or am destined to see her sixty thousand, it would be, and will be, precisely the same. I have not one thought, wish, or hope connected with her, unless it be — and I say this, not to hurt her feelings, but to impress her with the real state of my own — unless it be the one object, dear to my heart as life itself, of being one day able to turn my back upon this accursed place, never to set foot in it again, or think of it — even think of it — but with loathing and disgust.

[*Goes out.*

MISS SQUEERS

Come, 'Tilda, we 'd best be going. Mr. Nickleby is such an odd creature, and of such a violent temper, that I fear I shall be obliged to give him up.

[*Miss Price follows Miss Squeers out.*

SCENE VII

The schoolroom. SMIKE sits poring over a tattered book, and NICHOLAS walks up and down. It is evening, and they are alone. NICHOLAS lays his hand on SMIKE'S shoulder.

SMIKE

[*Looking up from his book*] I can't do it. No, no.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Do not try. [*Smike closes the book and weeps, laying his head on his arm.*] Do not, for Heaven's sake! I cannot bear to see you.

SMIKE

They are more hard with me than ever.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I know it. They are.

SMIKE

But for you, I should die. They would kill me; I know they would.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

You will do better, poor fellow, when I am gone.

SMIKE

[*Looking intently into his face*] Gone!

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Softly! Yes

SMIKE

[*In a whisper*] Are you going?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I cannot say. I was speaking more to my own thoughts than to you.

SMIKE

Tell me, oh, do tell me, *will* you go? *will* you?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I shall be driven to that at last! The world is before me, after all.

SMIKE

Tell me, is the world as bad and dismal as this place?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Heaven forbid! Its hardest, coarsest toil were happiness to this.

SMIKE

Should I ever meet you there?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Yes.

SMIKE

[*Clasping Nicholas by the hand*] No, no! Should I — should I — tell me that again. Say I should be sure to find you.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

You would, and I would help and aid you, and not bring fresh sorrow on you as I have done here.

[*Smike seizes the hand of Nicholas passionately and follows him out.*

SCENE VIII

The Boys' sleeping room. The Boys have risen from their poor beds and are putting on jackets and shoes. NICHOLAS walks among them, giving a bit of assistance or a kind word here and there.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Calling, outside*] Now then, are you going to sleep all day?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

We shall be down directly, sir.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Entering*] Down directly! Ah! you had better be down directly, or I 'll be down upon some of you. Where 's that Smike? [*Nicholas looks round the room silently.*] Smike!

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

He is not here, sir.

MR. SQUEERS

Don't tell me a lie. He is.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

He is not. Don't tell me one.

MR. SQUEERS

I 'll find him, I warrant you. [*Rushes to the corner where Smike usually sleeps, swinging his cane. The cane descends harmlessly on the floor.*] What does this mean? Where have you hid him?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I have seen nothing of him since last night.

MR. SQUEERS

Come, you won't save him this way. Where is he?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

At the bottom of the nearest pond for aught I know.

MR. SQUEERS

What do you mean by that? Do any of you boys know anything about Smike?

TOMPKINS

[*Raising his shrill voice above the general hum of anxious denial*] Please, sir, I think Smike 's run away, sir.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Turning round suddenly*] Ha! Who said that?

ALL

Tompkins, please sir.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Plunging into the crowd and catching a little boy*] You think he has run away, do you, sir?

TOMPKINS

Yes, please sir.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Cuffing the boy*] And what, sir, what reason have you to suppose that any boy would want to run away from this establishment? Eh, sir? [*The boy cries.*] If any other boy thinks Smike has run away, I should be glad to have a talk with him. [*Silence, during which Nicholas shows his disgust by looks.*] Well, Nickleby, *you* think he has run away, I suppose?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Quietly*] I think it extremely likely.

MR. SQUEERS

Oh, you do, do you? Maybe you know he has?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I know nothing of the kind.

MR. SQUEERS

He did n't tell you he was going, I suppose, did he?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

He did not. I am very glad he did not, for it would then have been my duty to warn you in time.

MR. SQUEERS

Which no doubt you would have been very sorry to do.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I should indeed. You interpret my feelings with great accuracy.

MRS. SQUEERS *enters.*

MRS. SQUEERS

What 's all this here to-do? What on earth are you talking to him for, Squeery?

MR. SQUEERS

Why, my dear, the fact is, that Smike is not to be found.

MRS. SQUEERS

Well, I know that, and where 's the wonder? If you get a parcel of proud-stomached teachers that set the young dogs a rebelling, what else can you look for? Now, young man, you just have the kindness to take yourself off to the school-room, and take the boys off with you, or you and I may fall out in a way that 'll spoil your beauty, handsome as you think yourself, and so I tell you.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Indeed!

MRS. SQUEERS

Yes; and indeed and indeed again, Mister Jackanapes; and I would n't keep such as you in the house another hour, if I had my way.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Nor would you if I had mine. Now, boys!

MRS. SQUEERS

Ah! [*Mimicking Nicholas*] Now boys. Follow your leader, boys, and take pattern by Smike if you dare. See what he 'll get for himself, when he is brought back; and, mind! I tell you that you shall have as bad, and twice as bad, if you so much as open your mouths about him.

MR. SQUEERS

If I catch him, I 'll give him a lesson, I give you notice, boys.

MRS. SQUEERS

If you catch him — you are sure to; you can't help it, if you go the right way to work. Come! Away with you! [*The Boys go out with Nicholas.*] He is off. The cow house and stable are locked up, so he can't be there; and he 's not downstairs anywhere, for the girl has looked. He must have gone York way, and by a public road too.

MR. SQUEERS

Why must he?

MRS. SQUEERS

Stupid! He had n't any money, had he?

MR. SQUEERS

Never had a penny of his own in his whole life, that I know of.

MRS. SQUEERS

To be sure, and he did n't take anything to eat with him; that I 'll answer for. Then, of course, he must beg his way, and he could do that nowhere but on the public road.

MR. SQUEERS

That 's true. [*Clapping his hands.*

MRS. SQUEERS

True! Yes; but you would never have thought of it, for all that, if I had n't said so. Now, if you take the chaise and go one road, and I borrow Swallow's chaise and go the other, what with keeping our eyes open, and asking questions, one or other of us is pretty certain to lay hold of him.

SCENE IX

The schoolroom. After a two days' search MRS. SQUEERS has returned, bringing the wretched SMIKE with her. In accordance with his custom in regard to runaways, MR. SQUEERS is about to make a severe example of SMIKE, and the Boys are assembled to witness the flogging. After dinner MR. SQUEERS comes to the schoolroom, accompanied by MRS. SQUEERS, and having in his hand a strong new lash.

[*In a tremendous voice*] Is every boy here? [*Glares along the lines. The Boys cower beneath his eye. He strikes the desk. The Boys start in nervous terror.*] Each boy keep his place. Nickleby! to your desk, sir.

[*There is a curious expression on Nickleby's face, but he takes his seat quietly. Squeers leaves the room and soon returns, dragging Smike. The Boys move uneasily in their seats, and the boldest exchange looks of indignation and pity.*

Have you anything to say for yourself? Nothing, I suppose. [*Smike looks at Nicholas as if hoping for protection.*] Have you anything to say? Stand a little out of the way, Mrs. Squeers, my dear; I 've hardly got room enough.

SMIKE

Spare me, sir!

MR. SQUEERS

Oh! that 's all, is it? Yes, I 'll flog you within an inch of your life, and spare you that.

MRS. SQUEERS

Ha, ha! That 's a good 'un!

SMIKE

I was driven to do it.

MR. SQUEERS

Driven to do it, were you? Oh! it was n't your fault; it was mine, I suppose — eh?

MRS. SQUEERS

What does he mean by that?

MR. SQUEERS

Stand aside, my dear. We 'll try and find out.

[*Seizes Smike and raises his arm for the first blow.*

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Starting up and shouting the word*] Stop!

MR. SQUEERS

Who cried "Stop"?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I. This must not go on. [*Steps forward.*

MR. SQUEERS

[*Savagely*] Must not go on!

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

No! [*Squeers releases Smike and gazes at Nicholas with a frightful expression.*] I say must not, shall not. I will prevent it. You have disregarded all my quiet interference in the miserable lad's behalf; you have returned no answer to the letter in which I begged forgiveness for him and offered to be responsible for his remaining quietly here. Don't blame me for this public interference. You have brought it upon yourself; not I.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Screaming with rage*] Sit down, beggar!

[*Seizes Smike again.*

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Wretch, touch him at your peril! I will not stand by and see it done. My blood is up, and I have the strength of ten such men as you. Look to yourself, for by Heaven I will not spare you, if you drive me on!

MR. SQUEERS

Stand back!

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I have a long series of insults to avenge, and my indignation is aggravated by the dastardly cruelties practiced here. Have a care; for if you do raise the devil within me, the consequences shall fall heavily upon your own head!

[*With a howl, Squeers strikes Nicholas with his lash. Nicholas wrests it from his grasp and beats Squeers till he cries for mercy. Master Squeers harasses Nicholas in the rear; Miss Squeers darts into the room and, after throwing various missiles at Nicholas, beats him with her fist. Mrs. Squeers, shrieking for aid, hangs to the tail of her husband's coat and endeavors to drag him away. Nicholas finally throws Squeers from him with all his strength, and Squeers, falling heavily, lies motionless. Nicholas bends over him, and finding that he is only stunned, goes out, looking in vain for Smike, who is nowhere to be seen.*

SCENE X

The road to London. NICHOLAS, carrying his small valise, and with but a few shillings in his pocket, has just started to make his way, two hundred and fifty miles, to London, when he meets JOHN BROWDIE, clad in corduroy and leggings, and carrying a stout ash stick. BROWDIE advances with a stern face.

JOHN BROWDIE

Servant, young genelman.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Yours.

JOHN BROWDIE

Weel; we ha' met at last.

[*Strikes his stick on the ground with emphasis.*

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Yes. Come! we parted on no very good terms the last time we met; it was my fault, I believe; but I had no intention of offending you, and no idea that I was doing so. I was very sorry for it, afterwards. Will you shake hands?

JOHN BROWDIE

Shake honds! ah! that I weel. [*They shake hands.*] But wa'at be the matter wi' thy feace, mun? it be all brokken loike.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

It is a cut, a blow; but I returned it to the giver, and with good interest, too.

JOHN BROWDIE

Noa, did 'ee though? Well deane! I loike 'un for thot.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

The fact is that I have been ill treated.

JOHN BROWDIE

Noa! dean't say thot.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Yes, I have, by that man Squeers, and I have beaten him soundly, and am leaving this place in consequence.

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Shouting*] What! Beatten the schoolmeasther! Ho! ho! ho! Beatten the schoolmeasther! who ever heard o' the loike o' that noo! Giv' us thee hond agean, yoongster. Beatten the schoolmeasther! I loove thee for 't. [*Laughs loud and long, and shakes Nicholas by the hand heartily*] And what will 'ee do now, young genelman?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I am going straight to London.

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Shaking his head*] Do 'ee know how much the coaches charge to carry a mun to Lunnun?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

No, I do not, but it is of no great consequence to me, for I intend walking.

JOHN BROWDIE

Gang awa' to Lunnun afoot!

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Every step of the way. I should be many steps further on by this time, and so good-by!

JOHN BROWDIE

Nay noo; hoo much cash hast thee gotten?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Not much, but I can make it enough. Where there 's a will there 's a way, you know.

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Pulling out an old purse*] I tell 'ee, a mun needs money if he 's going two hundred an' fifty miles to Lunnun. Don't be afeard, mun, tak' eneaf to carry thee whoam. Thee 'lt pay me yan day, a' warrant.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

A sovereign, since you are so kind.

JOHN BROWDIE

Hoot, mun, tak' more. If thee dean't spend it all thee can put the rest by. Tak' eneaf.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Not a farthing more.

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Giving Nicholas his stick*] Tak' that bit o' timber to help thee on wi', mun; keep a good heart, and bless thee. [*Shakes Nicholas by the hand*] Beatten the schoolmeasther! It 's the best thing a've heerd this twonty year!

[*Hastens away to escape the thanks of Nicholas, turning back to wave his hand cheerily. As Nicholas stands looking after him, Smike approaches noiselessly from the opposite direction, and kneels before Nicholas.*

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Smike, why do you kneel to me?

[*Raises Smike, who clings to his hand.*

SMIKE

To go with you — anywhere — everywhere — to the world's end — to the churchyard grave. Let me, oh, do let me! You are my home — my kind friend — take me with you, pray.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I am a friend who can do little for you. How came you here?

SMIKE

I followed you. Take me with you wherever you go.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Poor fellow! your hard fate denies you any friend but one, and he is nearly as poor and helpless as yourself.

SMIKE

May I — may I go with you? I will be your faithful, hard-working servant, I will, indeed. I want no clothes; these will do very well. I only want to be near you.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

And you shall. And the world shall deal by you as it does by me, till one or both of us shall quit it for a better. Come!

[*They go out together.*

SCENE XI

The Saracen's Head, London. MR. and MRS. JOHN BROWDIE have come to London to spend their honeymoon, and MISS SQUEERS, the bridesmaid, is of the party. MR. SQUEERS and his son WACKFORD are also in London, searching for SMIKE. The scene opens in the private sitting room where breakfast is being served. JOHN BROWDIE and his wife look handsome and happy. MISS SQUEERS is dressed in white, with a profusion of artificial roses, ribbons, and coral ornaments.

MISS SQUEERS

[*To the Waiter*] Is my pa in, do you know?

WAITER

Beg your pardon, Miss?

MISS SQUEERS

My pa, is he in?

WAITER

In where, Miss?

MISS SQUEERS

In the house. Is my pa, Mr. Wackford Squeers, here?

WAITER

I did n't know there was any gen'l'man of that name in the house, Miss. There may be, in the coffee room.

JOHN BROWDIE

Ye 'd betther inquire, mun. An' hond up another pigeon pie, will 'ee? [*The Waiter goes out. John looks into the empty dish*] Does he ca' this a pie — three young pigeons and a troifling matther o' steak, and a crust so loight that you doan't know when it 's in your mouth and when it 's gane? I wonder hoo many pies goes to a breakfast!

WAITER

[*Returning with another pie*] Beg your pardon, Mr. Squeers is not staying in the house, but he comes here every day, and when he comes they 'll show him upstairs. [*He goes out.*

JOHN BROWDIE

Have some of the pigeon pie, Fanny.

WAITER

[*Returning with* Visitors] Mr. Squeers and Mr. Wackford Squeers.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Shaking hands with the party*] Why, who 'd have thought of this?

MISS SQUEERS

Who, indeed, pa! But you see 'Tilda *is* married at last.

JOHN BROWDIE

And I stond threat for a soight o' Lunnon, schoolmeasther.

MR. SQUEERS

One of them things that young men do when they get married, and as runs through with their money like nothing at all!

JOHN BROWDIE

Will 'ee pick a bit?

MR. SQUEERS

I won't myself, but if you 'll just let little Wackford tuck into something fat, I 'll be obliged to you. Give it him in his fingers, else the waiter charges it on, and there 's lots of profit on this sort of stuff without that. [*To Wackford*] If you hear the waiter coming, sir, shove it in your pocket and look out of the window, d' ye hear?

WACKFORD SQUEERS

I'm awake, father.

MR. SQUEERS

[*To his daughter*] Well, it 's your turn to be married next. You must make haste.

MISS SQUEERS

[*Sharply*] Oh, I'm in no hurry.

MRS. BROWDIE

No, Fanny?

MISS SQUEERS

No, 'Tilda, *I* can wait.

MRS. BROWDIE

So can the young men, it seems, Fanny.

MISS SQUEERS

They are n't drawed into it by *me*, 'Tilda.

MRS. BROWDIE

No, that 's exceedingly true.

MR. SQUEERS

What do you think? We 've laid hands on him at last.

MISS SQUEERS

Pa! not Mr. ——?

MRS. BROWDIE

Nickleby?

MR. SQUEERS

No, but next door to him though.

MISS SQUEERS

You can't mean Smike? [*Clapping her hands.*

MR. SQUEERS

Yes, I can though. I've got him, hard and fast.

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Pushing his plate away*] Wa'at? Got that poor scoundrel? Where?

MR. SQUEERS

Why, in the top back room, at my lodgings, Snawley's, you know, with him on one side, and the key on the other.

JOHN BROWDIE

At thy loodgin'! Thee 'st gotten him at thy loodgin'? Ho! ho! The schoolmeasther agin all England! Give us thee hond, mun; I must shak thee by the hond for thot.—Gotten him at thy loodgin'? [*Hits Squeers a blow on the chest.*

MR. SQUEERS

[*Flinching from the blow*] Yes, thankee. Don't do it again. You mean it kindly, I know, but it hurts rather. Yes, there he is. That 's not so bad, is it?

JOHN BROWDIE

Ba'ad! It 's eneaf to scare a mun to hear tell on.

MR. SQUEERS

I thought it would surprise you a bit. It was pretty neatly done, and pretty quick, too.

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Sitting down beside Squeers*] Hoo wor it? Tell us all aboot it, mun; coom, quick!

MR. SQUEERS

Why, as we came down the street, there was Smike looking in at a jeweler's window. When he started on, Wackford clung tight round his leg, and I hooked him good and hard in the coat collar with the handle of my umbrella.

JOHN BROWDIE

I warrant he tried hard to get away.

MR. SQUEERS

It did n't do a bit of good. Wackford called a coach, and we got him safe inside, and then I thrashed him with the umbrella. I never thrashed a boy in a hackney coach before. There 's inconveniency in it, but the novelty gives it a sort of relish, too!

MISS SQUEERS

I knew you 'd find him, pa.

MR. SQUEERS

For fear he should give me the slip, by any chance, I 've taken three outsides for to-morrow morning — for Wackford and him and me — and have arranged to leave the accounts and the new boys to the agent, don't you see? So, it 's very lucky you came to-day, or you 'd have missed us; as it is, unless you could come and tea with me to-night, we sha'n't see anything more of you before we go away.

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Shaking him by the hand*] Dean't say anoother wurd; we'd coom, if it was twonty mile.

MR. SQUEERS

No, would you though?

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Seizing the schoolmaster's hand again*] We 'll be there, mun. We 'll leave seeing London till to-morrow, and we 'll be at Snawley's by six o'clock to-night as sure as my name 's John Browdie.

SCENE XII

The upper room in Snawley's house in which SMIKE is confined. JOHN BROWDIE having feigned illness, his wife asks that he be allowed to go upstairs and rest on MR. SQUEERS's bed. He has accordingly been assisted up the stairs, and his wife returns with the news that he is fast asleep. SMIKE sits in a corner, without coat and shoes.

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Hastening into the room, and covering Smike's mouth with his hand, he speaks in a whisper*] Odds-bobs, dost thee not know me, mun? Browdie. Chap as met thee efther schoolmeasther was banged?

SMIKE

Yes, yes. Oh! help me.

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Covering Smike's mouth again*] Help thee! Thee did n't need help, if thee warn't as silly yoongster as ever draw'd breath. Wa'at did 'ee come here for, then?

SMIKE

He brought me; oh! he brought me.

JOHN BROWDIE

Brout thee! Why did n't 'ee punch his head, or lay theeself doon and kick, and squeal out for the pollis? I 'd ha' licked a doozen such as him when I was yoong as thee. But thee be'st a poor broken-down chap, and God forgi' me for bragging ower yan o' his weakest creeturs! Stan' still, and doan't 'ee speak a morsel o' talk till I tell 'ee. [*Draws a screw driver from his pocket, deliberately takes off the box of the lock, and lays it with the screw driver on the floor*] See thot? Thot be thy doin'. Noo, coot awa'! [*Smike seems unable to comprehend.*] I say, coot awa'. Dost thee know where thee livest? Thee dost? Weel. Are yon thy clothes, or schoolmeasther's?

[*Pointing to a pair of shoes and a coat.*

SMIKE

Mine.

JOHN BROWDIE

On wi' 'em! [*Forcing the wrong arm into the wrong sleeve, and winding the tails of the coat round Smike's neck*] Noo, foller me, and when thee get'st ootside door, turn to the right. and they wean't see thee pass.

SMIKE

[*Trembling*] But — but — he 'll hear me shut the door.

JOHN BROWDIE

Then dean't shut it at all. Thee bean't afeard o' schoolmeasther's takkin cold, I hope?

SMIKE

N-no, [*His teeth chattering*] but he brought me back before, and will again. He will, he will indeed.

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Impatiently*] He wull, he wull? He wean't, he wean't. Look 'ee! I want to do this neighborly loike, and let them think thee 's gotten awa' o' theeself, but if he cooms oot o' thot parlor awhiles thee 'rt clearing off, he mun have mercy on his oun boans, for I wean't. If he foinds it oot, soon efther, I 'll put 'un on a wrong scent, I warrant 'ee. But if thee keep'st a good heart, thee 'lt be at whoam afore they know thee 'st gotten off. Coom! Thee 'lt just tell yoong Measther that I 'm sploiced to Tilly Price, and to be heerd on at the Saracen by latther, and that I bean't jealous of 'un. Coom! Cut awa'! [*Leads Smike out.*

SCENE XIII

The Saracen's Head. A substantial meal is set forth in JOHN BROWDIE'S sitting room, for NICHOLAS NICKLEBY is expected to tea. MRS. BROWDIE sits on the sofa, and JOHN BROWDIE hovers about the table, now and then helping himself to a crumb.

JOHN BROWDIE

Tilly!

MRS. BROWDIE

Well, John!

JOHN BROWDIE

Weel, John! [*Impatiently*] Dost thou feel hoongry, lass?

MRS. BROWDIE

Not very

JOHN BROWDIE

Not vary! [*Looking at the ceiling*] Hear her say "not vary," and us dining at three, and loonching off pasthry thot aggravates a mon 'stead of pacifying him! Not vary!

WAITER

[*At the door*] Here 's a gen'l'man for you, sir.

JOHN BROWDIE

A wa'at, for me?

WAITER

A gen'l'man, sir.

JOHN BROWDIE

Stars and garthers, chap! wa'at dost thou coom and say thot for? In wi' 'un.

WAITER

Are you at home, sir?

JOHN BROWDIE

At whoam! I wish I wur; I'd ha' tea'd two hour ago. Why, I told t' oother chap to look sharp ootside door, and tell 'un, d'rectly he coom, thot we war faint wi' hoonger. In wi' 'un. Aha!

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY *enters.*

Thee hond, Misther Nickleby. This is nigh to be the proodest day o' my life, sir. Hoo be all wi' ye? Ding! But I'm so glod o' this! [*Shakes hands with Nicholas most heartily, again and again. Nicholas looks at Mrs. Browdie.*] Ah! there she be. We sha'n't quarrel about her noo — eh? When I think o' thot night — but thou want'st soom 'at to eat. Fall to, mun, fall to.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Placing a chair for the bride and taking his seat at the table*] You remember the night of our first tea drinking?

JOHN BROWDIE

Shall I e'er forget it, mun?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

He was a desperate fellow that night though, was he not, Mrs. Browdie? Quite a monster?

MRS. BROWDIE

If you had only heard him as we were going home, Mr. Nickleby, you 'd have said so indeed. I never was so frightened in all my life.

JOHN BROWDIE

Coom, coom, thou know'st betther than thot, Tilly.

[*With a broad grin.*

MRS. BROWDIE

So I was. I almost made up my mind never to speak to you again.

JOHN BROWDIE

A'most! A'most made up her mind! And she wur coaxin', and coaxin', and wheedlin,' and wheedlin' a' the blessed wa'. "Wa'at didst thou let yon chap mak' oop tiv 'ee for?" says I. "I deed n't, John," says she, a squeedgin my arm. "You deed n't?" says I. "Noa," says she.

MRS. BROWDIE

Lor, John! How can you talk such nonsense? As if I should have dreamt of such a thing!

JOHN BROWDIE

I dinnot know whether thou 'd ever dreamt of it, though I think that 's loik eneaf, mind, but thou didst it. "Ye 're a feeckle, changeable weathercock, lass," says I. "Not feeckle, John," says she. "Yes," says I, "feeckle. Dinnot tell me thou bean't, efther yon chap at schoolmeasther's," says I.

"Him!" says she, quite screeching. "Ah! him!" says I. "Why, John," says she — "dost thou think it 's nat'ral noo, that having such a proper mun as thou to keep company wi', I'd ever tak' oop wi' such a leetle scanty whippersnapper as yon?" she says. Ha! ha! ha! She said whippersnapper! "Well!" I says, "efther thot, neame the day, and let 's have it ower!" Ha! ha! ha! [*All laugh together.*

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

This is the second time that we have ever taken a meal together, and only the third I have ever seen you; and yet it really seems to me as if I were among old friends.

JOHN BROWDIE

Weel! so I say.

MRS. BROWDIE

And I am sure I do.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I have the best reason to be impressed with the feeling, mind; for if it had not been for your kindness of heart, my good friend, when I had no right or reason to expect it, I know not what might have become of me or what plight I should have been in by this time.

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Gruffly*] Talk aboot soom 'at else, and dinnot bother.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

[*Smiling*] It must be a new song to the same tune then. I told you in my letter that I deeply felt and admired your sympathy with that poor lad, whom you released at the risk

of involving yourself in trouble and difficulty; but I can never tell you how grateful he and I, and others whom you don't know, are to you for taking pity on him.

JOHN BROWDIE

And I can never tell *you* hoo gratful soom folks that we do know would be loikewise, if *they* know'd I had takken pity on him.

MRS. BROWDIE

Ah! what a state I was in, that night!

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Were they at all disposed to give you credit for assisting in the escape?

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Smiling*] Not a bit. There I lay, snoog in schoolmeasther's bed long efther it was dark, and nobody cooming nigh the pleace. "Weel!" thinks I, "he 's got a pretty good start, and if he bean't whoam by noo, he never will be; so you may coom as quick as you loike, and foind us reddy"—that is, you know, schoolmeasther might coom.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I understand.

JOHN BROWDIE

Presently he *did* coom. I heerd door shut doonstairs, and him a warking oop in the daark. "Slow and steddy," I says to myself, "tak' your time, sir—no hurry." He cooms to the door, turns the key—turns the key when there warn't nothing to hoold the lock!—and ca's oot "Hallo, there!"—"Yes," thinks I, "you may do thot agean, and not wakken anybody, sir." "Hallo, there," he says, and then he stops.

"Thou 'd better not aggravate me," says schoolmeasther, efther a little time. "I 'll brak' every boan in your boddy, Smike," he says, efther another little time. Then all of a soodden, he sings oot for a loight, and when it cooms — such a hoorly-boorly! "Wa'at 's the matter?" says I. "He 's gane," says he — stark mad wi' vengeance. "Have you heerd nought?" "Ees," says I, "I heerd street door shut, no time at a' ago. I heerd a person run doon there" (pointing t' other wa' — eh?) "Help!" he cries. "I 'll help you," says I; and off we set — the wrong wa'! Ho! ho! ho!

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Did you go far?

JOHN BROWDIE

Far! I run him clean off his legs in quarther of an hour. To see old schoolmeasther wi'out his hat, skimming along oop to his knees in mud and wather, tumbling over fences, and rowling into ditches, and bawling oot like mad, wi' his one eye looking sharp out for the lad, and his coat tails flying out behind, and him spattered wi' mud all ower, face and all! I thot I should ha' dropped doon, and killed myself wi' laughing. He 's a bad 'un, a very bad 'un, is schoolmeasther.

[*All laugh most heartily.*

MRS. BROWDIE

I can't bear the sight of him, John.

JOHN BROWDIE

Coom, thot 's tidy in you, thot is. If it wa'ant along o' you, we should n't know nought aboot 'un. Thou know'd 'un first, Tilly, did n't thou?

MRS. BROWDIE

I could n't help knowing Fanny Squeers, John; she was an old playmate of mine, you know.

JOHN BROWDIE

Weel, dean't I say so, lass? It 's best to be neighborly, and keep up old acquaintance loike; and dean't quarrel if 'ee can help it. [*To Nickleby*] Dinnot think so, Mr. Nickleby?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Certainly, and you acted upon that principle when I met you on the road, after our memorable evening.

JOHN BROWDIE

Sure-ly; wa'at I say, I stick by.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

And that 's a fine thing to do, and manly too, though it 's not exactly what we understand by "coming Yorkshire over us" in London. Miss Squeers is staying with you, you said in your note.

JOHN BROWDIE

Yes, Tilly's bridesmaid; and a queer bridesmaid she be, too. She wean't be a bride in a hurry, I reckon.

MRS. BROWDIE

For shame, John.

JOHN BROWDIE

The groom will be a blessed mun. He 'll be in luck, he will.

MRS. BROWDIE

You see, Mr. Nickleby, that it was in consequence of her being here, that John wrote to you and fixed to-night, because we thought that it would n't be pleasant for you to meet, after what has passed.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Unquestionably. You were quite right in that.

MRS. BROWDIE

John fixed to-night, because she had settled that she would go and drink tea with her father. And to make quite sure of there being nothing amiss, and of your being quite alone with us, he settled to go out there and fetch her home.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

That was a very good arrangement, though I am sorry to be the occasion of so much trouble.

MRS. BROWDIE

Not the least in the world, for we have looked forward to seeing you — John and I have — with the greatest possible pleasure. Do you know, Mr. Nickleby, that I really think Fanny Squeers was very fond of you?

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I am very much obliged to her, but, upon my word, I never aspired to making any impression upon her virgin heart.

MRS. BROWDIE

How you talk! No, but do you know that really — seriously now and without any joking — I was given to understand

by Fanny herself, that you had made an offer to her, and that you two were going to be engaged quite solemn and regular.

MISS SQUEERS *throws the door wide open and enters with* MR. SQUEERS *and* WACKFORD SQUEERS.

MISS SQUEERS

Was you, ma'am — was you? Was you given to understand that I — I — was going to be engaged to an assassinating thief that shed the gore of my pa? Do you — do you think, ma'am — that I was very fond of such dirt beneath my feet, as I could n't condescend to touch with kitchen tongs, without blacking and crocking myself by the contract? Do you, ma'am? Do you? Oh, base and degrading 'Tilda! [*In her excitement she aspirates her h's strongly*] This is the hend, is it, of all my forbearance and friendship for that double-faced thing — that viper — that — that — mermaid? This is the hend, is it, of all my bearing with her deceitfulness, her lowness, her falseness, her laying herself out to catch the admiration of vulgar minds, in a way which made me blush for my — for my —

MR. SQUEERS

Gender.

MISS SQUEERS

Yes, but I thank my stars that my ma' is of the same.

MR. SQUEERS

Hear, hear! And I wish she was here to have a scratch at this company.

MISS SQUEERS

This is the hend, is it, of my taking notice of that rubbishing creature, and demeaning myself to patronize her?

MRS. BROWDIE

[*Disregarding her husband's efforts to restrain her*] Oh, come, don't talk such nonsense as that.

MISS SQUEERS

Have I not patronized you, ma'am?

MRS. BROWDIE

No.

MISS SQUEERS

I will not look for blushes in such a quarter, for that countenance is a stranger to everything but hignominiousness and red-faced boldness.

JOHN BROWDIE

I say, dra' it mild, dra' it mild.

MISS SQUEERS

You, Mr. Browdie, I pity—I have no feeling for you, sir, but one of unliquidated pity.

JOHN BROWDIE

Oh!

MISS SQUEERS

[*Looking sideways at her father*] No, although I *am* a queer bridesmaid, and *sha'n't* be a bride in a hurry, and although my husband *will* be in luck, I entertain no sentiments towards you, sir, but sentiments of pity. *I* know what you 've got to go through. *I* know what life is before you, and if you was my bitterest and deadliest enemy, I could wish you nothing worse.

MRS. BROWDIE

Could n't you wish to be married to him yourself, if that was the case?

MISS SQUEERS

Oh, ma'am, how witty you are! almost as witty, ma'am, as you are clever. How very clever it was in you, ma'am, to choose a time when I had gone to tea with my pa, and was sure not to come back without being fetched! What a pity you never thought that other people might be as clever as yourself and spoil your plans!

MRS. BROWDIE

You won't vex me, child, with such airs as these.

MISS SQUEERS

Don't *Missis* me, ma'am, if you please; I 'll not bear it. Is *this* the hend —

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Impatiently*] Say thee say out, Fanny, and mak' sure it 's the end, and dinnot ask nobody whether it is or not.

MISS SQUEERS

Thanking you for your advice, which was not required, Mr. Browdie, have the goodness not to presume to meddle with my Christian name. Even my pity shall never make me forget what 's due to myself, Mr. Browdie. [*Spitefully*] 'Tilda, I throw you off forever, Miss. I abandon you. I renounce you.

MRS. BROWDIE

If it 's fated that listeners are never to hear any good of themselves, I can't help it, and I am very sorry for it. But I will say, Fanny, that times out of number I have spoken so kindly of you behind your back, that even you could have found no fault with what I said.

MISS SQUEERS

Oh, I dare say not, ma'am. Best thanks to you for your goodness, and begging and praying you not to be hard upon me another time.

MRS. BROWDIE

I don't know that I have said anything very bad of you, even now. At all events, what I did say was quite true; but if I have, I am very sorry for it, and I beg your pardon. You have said much worse of me, scores of times, Fanny, but I have never borne any malice to you, and I hope you 'll not bear any to me.

MISS SQUEERS

[*Surveying Mrs. Browdie from head to foot with disdain*] Puss — minx — contemptible creature!

[*Master Squeers has been pilfering lumps of sugar, pieces of bread, et cetera, from the table, and has at last attacked the pigeon pie. Mr. Squeers, seeing that, in the temporary calm, his proceedings must be observed, feigns to be aware of his conduct for the first time, and slaps him with vigor.*

MR. SQUEERS

Eating of what his father's enemies has left! It 's fit to go and poison you, you unnat'ral boy.

JOHN BROWDIE

It wean't hurt him; let 'un eat. I wish the whole school was here. I'd give 'em soom'ut to stay their unfort'nate stomachs wi', if I spent the last penny I had! [*Squeers scowls maliciously and shakes his fist.*] Coom, coom, schoolmeasther,

dinnot make a fool o' thyself; for if I was to sheake mine — only once — thou 'd fa' doon wi' the wind o' it.

MR. SQUEERS

It was you, was it, that helped off my runaway boy? It was you, was it?

JOHN BROWDIE

[*Loudly*] Me! Yes it wa' me, coom; wa'at o' that! It wa' me. Noo then!

MR. SQUEERS

[*To his daughter*] You hear him say he did it, my child! You hear him say he did it!

JOHN BROWDIE

Did it! I 'll tell 'ee more; hear this, too. If thou 'd get another roonaway boy, I 'd do it agean. If thou 'd got twonty roonaway boys, I 'd do it twonty times ower, and twonty more to thot; and I tell thee more, noo my blood is oop, that thou 't an old ra'ascal; and that it 's weel for thou, thou be'st an old 'un, or I 'd ha' pounded thee to flour when thou told an honest mun hoo thou 'd licked that poor chap in t' coorch.

MR. SQUEERS

[*With a sneer*] An honest man!

JOHN BROWDIE

Ah! An honest man, honest in aught but ever putting legs under seame table wi' such as thou.

MR. SQUEERS

[*Exultingly*] Scandal! Two witnesses to it; Wackford knows the nature of an oath, he does; we shall have you

there, sir. Rascal, eh! [*Takes out his pocketbook and makes a note of it*] Very good. I should say that was worth full twenty pound at the next assizes, without the honesty, sir.

JOHN BROWDIE

'Soizes, thou 'd better not talk to me o' 'Soizes. Yorkshire schools have been shown up at 'Soizes afore noo, mun, and it 's a ticklish soobject to revive, I can tell ye.

[*Squeers shakes his head threateningly and retreats toward the door, taking his daughter's arm and dragging Wackford by the hand.*

MR. SQUEERS

[*To Nicholas*] As for you, see if I ain't down upon you before long.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

I am not afraid.

MR. SQUEERS

Ain't you! [*To daughter and Wackford*] Now then, come along.

MISS SQUEERS

I leave such society, with my pa, for *h*ever. I am defiled by breathing the air with such creatures. Poor Mr. Browdie! I do pity him, that I do; he 's so deluded! — Artful and designing 'Tilda!

[*Goes out in stern and majestic dignity, but is heard to sob and scream and struggle outside.*

JOHN BROWDIE

[*After standing some time looking from his wife to Nicholas and back again, with mouth wide open, he rings the bell*]

Here, waither, look alive here. Tak' these things awa', and let 's have soomat broiled for sooper — vary coomfortable and plenty o' it — at ten o'clock. Bring a pair of slippers — the largest pair in the house — and be quick aboot it. Dash ma' wig! [*Rubbing his hands*] There 's no ganging oot to-neeght, noo, to fetch anybody whoam, and we 'll begin to spend the evening in airnest!

THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH

THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH

CHARACTERS

JOHN PEERYBINGLE	BERTHA PLUMMER
CALEB PLUMMER	MAY FIELDING
EDWARD PLUMMER	MRS. FIELDING
TACKLETON	TILLY SLOWBOY
MRS. PEERYBINGLE	

Man, Father, Mother

SCENE I

JOHN PEERYBINGLE is a carrier, who brings packages and does errands like a modern expressman. He has married a wife much younger than himself, pretty and charming, and devoted to her home. She is quick and tactful; JOHN is slow, but faithful as the sun. The scene opens in MRS. PEERYBINGLE'S kitchen, a bright and cheery place. The cloth is laid for supper. MRS. PEERYBINGLE has her baby in her arms, and TILLY SLOWBOY, the eccentric maid, goes in and out preparing supper. JOHN PEERYBINGLE enters, wrapped to the chin, and greets his wife affectionately. A cricket is heard to chirp occasionally.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Oh, goodness, John! What a state you are in with the weather!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Unrolling a muffler from his throat*] Why, you see, Dot, it is n't exactly summer weather — so, no wonder.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

I wish you would n't call me Dot, John. I don't like it.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Why, what else are you? [*Smiling*] A dot and — [*Pointing to the baby*] a dot and carry — I won't say it, for fear I should spoil it; but I was very near a joke. I don't know as ever I was nearer.

[*Mrs. Peerybingle stands near her husband with the baby. Tilly watches them with open eyes and mouth.*

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Isn't he beautiful, John? See how precious he looks in his sleep.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Very precious. Very much so. He generally *is* asleep, isn't he?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

No, John! Good gracious, no.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Oh! I thought his eyes were generally shut. [*Looking at the baby with great interest*] Halloa!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Goodness, John, how you startle one!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

It isn't right for him to turn 'em up in that way! Is it? See how he 's winking with both of 'em at once! And look at his mouth! Why, he 's gasping like a gold and silver fish!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

You don't deserve to be a father, you don't. But how should you know what little complaints children are troubled

with, John? You would n't so much as know their names, you stupid fellow. [*Laughing.*

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Pulling off his overcoat*] It 's very true, Dot. I don't know much about it. I only know that I 've been fighting pretty stiffly with the wind, to-night. It 's been blowing north-east, straight into the cart, all the way home.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Poor old man, so it has! Here! Take the precious darling, Tilly, while I make myself of some use. Only let me make the tea first, John; and then I 'll help you with the parcels, like a busy bee. "How doth the little" — and all the rest of it, you know, John. Did you ever learn "How doth the little," when you went to school, John?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Not to quite know it. I was very near it once. But I should only have spoilt it, I dare say.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

What a dear old dunce you are, John, to be sure!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

I 'll go and see after the horse.

[*He goes out, and, while Tilly holds the baby, Mrs. Peerybingle hastens to make the tea and put the food upon the table. She brings in a clothes basket and puts it upon the floor as John returns.*

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

There! The tea 's made. And there 's the old knuckle of ham; and there 's the butter; and there 's the crusty loaf, and all! Here 's the clothes basket for the small parcels, John. [*To Tilly*] Don't let the child fall under the grate, whatever you do!

[*Mr. and Mrs. Peerybingle carry the basket out, and soon return. He carries it, partly filled with parcels; she pretends to help him. The Cricket chirps.*

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Hear the Cricket! It 's merrier than ever, to-night, I think.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

And it 's sure to bring us good fortune, John! It always has done so. To have a Cricket on the Hearth is the luckiest thing in all the world! The first time I heard its cheerful note, John, was on that night when you brought me home — when you brought me to my new home here; its little mistress. Nearly a year ago. You remember, John? [*He nods.*] Its chirp was such a welcome to me! It seemed so full of promise and encouragement! It seemed to say you would be kind and gentle with me, and would not expect to find an old head on the shoulders of your foolish little wife. It spoke the truth, John, when it seemed to say so; for you have ever been, I am sure, the best, the most considerate, the most affectionate of husbands to me. This has been a happy home, John, and I love the Cricket for its sake.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Why, so do I, then; so do I, Dot.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

I love it for the many times I have heard it, and the many thoughts its harmless music has given me. When I used to fear that ours might prove to be an ill-assorted marriage, I being such a child, and you more like my guardian than my husband, and that you might not be able to learn to love me, as you hoped you might, the Cricket's chirp has cheered me up again, and filled me with new trust and confidence. I was thinking of these things to-night, dear, when I sat expecting you; and I love the Cricket for their sake.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

And so do I. But, Dot? *I* hope that I might learn to love you? How you talk! I had learnt that, long before I brought you here, to be the Cricket's little mistress, Dot.

[*Mrs. Peerybingle lays her hand on her husband's arm and looks up at him earnestly a moment as if about to speak. Then she kneels beside the basket, busy with the parcels.*

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

There are not many of them to-night, John, but I saw some goods behind the cart, just now; and though they give more trouble, perhaps they pay as well. So we have no reason to grumble, have we? Besides, you have been delivering, I dare say, as you came along?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Oh, yes, a good many.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Why, what 's this round box? Heart alive, John, it 's a wedding cake!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Leave a woman alone to find out that. Now a man would never have thought of it. Whereas it 's my belief that if you was to pack a wedding cake in a tea chest or a pickled-salmon keg, a woman would be sure to find it out directly. Yes; I called for it at the pastry-cook's.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

And it weighs I don't know what — whole hundred weights! [*Making believe try to lift it*] Whose is it, John? Where is it going?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Read the writing on the other side.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Why, John! My goodness, John!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Ah! Who 'd have thought it!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

You never mean to say that it 's Gruff and Tackleton, the toy maker! [*John nods.*

TILLY SLOWBOY

[*Dandling the Baby and speaking to it in a singsong monotone*] Was it Gruffs and Tackletons the toy makers, then? Would it call at pastry cooks for wedding cakes? Did its mothers know the boxes when its fathers brought them homes? Did it read the writing on the other side?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

And that is really to come about! Why, she and I were girls at school together, John! And he 's so old! So unlike her! Why, how many years older than you is Gruff and Tackleton, John?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Speaking good-naturedly, as he draws a chair to the table and begins to eat*] How many more cups of tea shall I drink to-night at one sitting than Gruff and Tackleton ever took in four, I wonder! As to eating, I eat but little; but that little I enjoy, Dot. [*Mrs. Peerybingle pushes the box away with her foot and stands silent and abstracted.*] Come, Dot.

[*He raps on the table with his knife, but she does not move till he rises and touches her on the arm. Then she takes her place at the table, laughing at herself.*

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Why, what a silly I am, to be sure, letting your tea get cold while I stand like a post! So these are all the parcels; are they, John?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

That 's all. Why — no — I — [*Laying down his knife and fork and taking a long breath*] I declare — I 've clean forgotten the old gentleman!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

The old gentleman?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

In the cart. He was asleep in the cart the last time I saw him. I 've very nearly remembered him twice since I came

in; but he went out of my head again. [*Hastening out*] Halloo! Yahip, there! Rouse up! That 's my hearty!

Soon returns with a Stranger, *an old man with long white hair, carrying a walking stick. The* Stranger's *dress is quaint. He sits down silently.*

There! That 's the way I found him, sitting by the roadside! Upright as a milestone and almost as deaf.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Sitting in the open air, John!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

In the open air, just at dusk. "Carriage paid," he said, and gave me eighteenpence. Then he got in, and there he is.

STRANGER

If you please, I was to be left till called for. Don't mind me. [*Takes spectacles and a book from his pockets and begins to read. As John and his wife stand curiously observant, he looks up and glances at them*] Your daughter, my good friend?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Wife.

STRANGER

Niece?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Shouting*] Wife.

STRANGER

Indeed? Very young! [*After reading a line or two*] Baby yours? [*John nods emphatically.*] Girl?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Shouting*] Bo-o-oy!

STRANGER

Also very young, eh?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

[*Shouting*] Two months and three da-ays! Vaccinated just six weeks ago-o! Took very fine-ly! Considered, by the doctor, a remarkably beautiful chi-ild! Takes notice in a way quite won-der-ful! May seem impossible to you, but feels his legs al-ready!

[*Holds the Baby up to the Stranger, and Tilly Slowboy gambols before the child.*

TILLY SLOWBOY

Ketcher, ketcher, baby! Ketcher, ketcher!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Hark! He 's called for, sure enough. There 's somebody at the door. Open it, Tilly.

CALEB PLUMMER *enters. He is a spare, serious little man and wears a coat made of sackcloth, with the initials G & T and the word GLASS in large black letters on the back.* CALEB *is in the employ of* TACKLETON, *the rich toy merchant, and his blind daughter* BERTHA *dresses dolls at home.*

CALEB PLUMMER

Good evening, John! Good evening, mum. Good evening, Tilly. Good evening, Unbeknown! How 's baby, mum?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

He 's thriving, Caleb. I am sure you need only look at the dear child to know that.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Busy just now, Caleb?

CALEB PLUMMER

Why, pretty well, John. Pretty much so. There 's rather a run on Noah's Arks at present. I could have wished to improve upon the Family, but I don't see how it 's to be done at the price. It would be a satisfaction to one 's mind to make it clearer which was Shems and Hams, and which was Wives. Flies are n't on that scale neither, as compared with elephants, you know! Ah! Well! Have you anything in the parcel line for me, John?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Taking from his pocket a tiny flowerpot wrapped in paper*] There it is! Not so much as a leaf damaged. Full of buds!

CALEB PLUMMER

Thank you, John.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Dear, Caleb, very dear at this season.

CALEB PLUMMER

Never mind that. It would be cheap to me, whatever it cost. Anything else, John?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

A small box. Here you are!

CALEB PLUMMER

[*Reading the direction*] "For Caleb Plummer. With cash." — With cash, John? I don't think it 's for me.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Reading the direction over Caleb's shoulder*] "With care." — Where do you make out cash?

CALEB PLUMMER

Oh! To be sure! It 's all right. With care! Yes, yes; that 's mine. It might have been with cash, indeed, if my dear boy in the Golden South Americas had lived, John. You loved him like a son; did n't you? You need n't say you did. *I* know, of course. [*Reads*] "Caleb Plummer. With care." Yes, it 's all right. It 's a box of dolls' eyes for my daughter's work. I wish it was her own sight in a box, John.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

I wish it was, or could be!

CALEB PLUMMER

Thank 'ee; you speak very hearty. To think that she should never see the dolls that stare at her all day long! That 's where it cuts. What 's the damage, John?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

I 'll damage you, if you inquire. Dot! Very near a joke?

CALEB PLUMMER

Well! It 's like you to say so. It 's your kind way. Let me see. I think that 's all.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

I think not. Try again.

CALEB PLUMMER

Something for our Governor, eh? To be sure! That's what I came for, but my head's so running on them Arks and things! He has n't been here, has he?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Not he! He 's too busy courting.

CALEB PLUMMER

He 's coming round, though; for he told me to keep on the near side of the road going home, and it was ten to one he 'd take me up. I had better go, by the bye. Good night.

[*Goes toward the door.*

Enter TACKLETON, *the toy merchant. He is an elderly man with an ill-natured expression, unattractive in face and figure.*

TACKLETON

Oh! You are here, are you? Wait a bit. I 'll take you home.

[*Caleb comes back and puts the cake box down again. He sits down in a corner and falls asleep.*

John Peerybingle, my service to you. More of my service to your pretty wife. Handsomer every day! Better too, if possible! [*Continuing in a low voice*] And younger, that 's the worst of it!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

[*Not very cordially*] I should be astonished at your paying compliments, Mr. Tackleton, but for your condition.

TACKLETON

You know all about it, then?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

I have got myself to believe it, somehow.

TACKLETON

After a hard struggle, I suppose?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Very.

TACKLETON

In three days' time. Next Thursday. The last day of the first month in the year. That 's my wedding day.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Why, it 's our wedding day too.

TACKLETON

Ha, ha! Odd! You 're just such another couple. Just! I say! A word with you. [*Taking John Peerybingle a little apart*] You 'll come to the wedding? We 're in the same boat, you know.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

How in the same boat?

TACKLETON

A little disparity, you know. Come and spend an evening with us beforehand.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Why?

TACKLETON

Why? That 's a new way of receiving an invitation. Why, for pleasure — sociability, you know, and all that!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

I thought you were never sociable.

TACKLETON

It 's of no use to be anything but free with you, I see. Why, then, the truth is you have a — what tea-drinking people call a sort of comfortable appearance together, you and your wife. We know better, you know, but —

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

No, we don't know better. What are you talking about?

TACKLETON

Well! we *don't* know better, then; we 'll agree that we don't. As you like; what does it matter? I was going to say, as you have that sort of appearance, your company will produce a favorable effect on Mrs. Tackleton that will be. And, though I don't think your good lady 's very friendly to me in this matter, still she can't help herself from falling into my views, for there 's a compactness and coziness of appearance about her that always tells, even in an indifferent case. You 'll say you 'll come?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

We have arranged to keep our wedding day at home. We have made the promise to ourselves these six months. We think, you see, that home —

TACKLETON

Bah! what 's home? Four walls and a ceiling! There are four walls and a ceiling at my house. Come to me! Say you 'll come. It 's as much your interest as mine, you know, that the women should persuade each other that they 're quiet and contented, and could n't be better off. I know their way.

Whatever one woman says, another woman is determined to clinch, always. There 's that spirit of emulation among 'em, sir, that if your wife says to my wife, "I 'm the happiest woman in the world, and mine 's the best husband in the world, and I dote on him," my wife will say the same to yours, or more, and half believe it.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Do you mean to say she does n't, then?

TACKLETON

Does n't what?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Does n't believe it?

TACKLETON

Ah, you dog! You 're joking. I have the humor, sir, to marry a young and pretty wife. I 'm able to gratify that humor, and I do. It 's my whim. But — now look there. [*Motions to where Mrs. Peerybingle is sitting, her chin upon her hand, as if her thoughts were far away*] She honors and obeys, no doubt, you know; and that, as I am not a man of sentiment, is quite enough for me. But do you think there 's anything more in it?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

I think that I should chuck any man out of window, who said there was n't.

TACKLETON

Exactly so. To be sure! Doubtless you would. Of course. I 'm certain of it. Good-night. Pleasant dreams! Good-night, my dear friend. We 're exactly alike, in reality, I see. You won't give us to-morrow evening? Well! Next day you go

out visiting, I know. I 'll go to the same place, and bring my wife that is to be, to meet you. It 'll do her good. You 're agreeable? Thank 'ee. [*Mrs. Peerybingle gives a loud, sudden cry.*] What 's that?

[*They turn to look at her, and see her standing as if transfixed by terror or surprise. The Stranger is standing before her.*

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Dot! Mary! Darling! What 's the matter? [*They gather about her. Caleb, waking suddenly, seizes Tilly by the hair automatically and immediately apologizes.*] Mary! Are you ill? What is it? Tell me, dear!

[*Mrs. Peerybingle laughs and cries hysterically. The Stranger stands motionless.*

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

I'm better, John. I'm quite well now — I — John! [*Although speaking to her husband, she turns her face toward the Stranger*] Only a fancy, John, dear — a kind of shock — a something coming suddenly before my eyes — I don't know what it was. It 's quite gone, quite gone.

TACKLETON

[*Looking suspiciously around the room*] I'm glad it 's gone. I wonder where it 's gone, and what it was. Humph! Caleb, come here! Who 's that with the gray hair?

CALEB PLUMMER

[*Whispering*] I don't know, sir. Never saw him before in all my life. A beautiful figure for a nutcracker; quite a new

model. With a screw jaw opening down into his waistcoat, he 'd be lovely.

TACKLETON

Not ugly enough.

CALEB PLUMMER

Or for a fire box, either, he 'd be a capital model. Unscrew his head to put the matches in; turn him heels up'ards for the light; and what a fire box for a gentleman's mantelshelf, just as he stands!

TACKLETON

Not half ugly enough. Nothing in him at all. Come! Bring that box! All right now, I hope?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Oh, the shock is quite gone, quite gone. [*Waving him hurriedly away*] Good-night!

TACKLETON

Good-night! Good-night, John! [*To Caleb*] Take care how you carry that box, Caleb. Let it fall, and I 'll murder you! [*Looking out*] Weather worse than ever, eh? Good-night!

[*Goes out, followed by Caleb with the wedding cake on his head. John Peerybingle looks at the Stranger, who stands before him.*

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

You see, Dot, he does n't belong to them. I must give him a hint to go.

STRANGER

[*Advancing a step or two*] I beg your pardon, friend; the more so as I fear your wife has not been well. But the

attendant whom my infirmity renders almost indispensable not having arrived, I fear there must be some mistake. The bad night which made the shelter of your comfortable cart so acceptable is still as bad as ever. Would you in your kindness suffer me to rent a bed here?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Yes, yes! Certainly!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Oh! well! I don't object; still I'm not quite sure that—

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Hush! dear John!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Why, he's stone deaf.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

I know he is, but— [*To Stranger*] Yes, sir, certainly. [*To John*] I'll make him up a bed directly, John.

[*Speaks so earnestly and with such agitation that John turns to look after her as she hurries from the room.*

TILLY SLOWBOY

[*Dancing the Baby*] Did its mothers make it up a beds then! And did its hair grow brown and curly, when its caps was lifted off, and frighten it, a precious pets, a-sitting by the fires!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*To himself as he walks to and fro*] What frightened Dot, I wonder?

Enter MRS. PEERYBINGLE.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

The gentleman's bed is ready, John. [*John Peerybingle goes out with the Stranger.*] Give me the baby, Tilly. It 's time you were abed. Good-night.

TILLY SLOWBOY

Good-night, mum.

SCENE II

The home of CALEB PLUMMER. CALEB is painting a doll's house; BERTHA, his blind daughter, is dressing dolls. Other toys are scattered about. It is a poor place, but BERTHA does not know how poor. She does not know that TACKLETON is a cold, hard master, for CALEB has surrounded his motherless, sightless daughter with fictitious brightness of his own painting. She thinks her home a pleasant one; she believes her father to be a young and vigorous man, thriving and prosperous; she pictures TACKLETON as the opposite of his real self — large-hearted, generous, and tender.

BERTHA

So you were out in the rain last night, father, in your beautiful new greatcoat.

CALEB PLUMMER

[*Glancing at a clothesline in the room, on which hangs his sackcloth coat*] In my beautiful new greatcoat.

BERTHA

How glad I am you bought it, father!

CALEB PLUMMER

And of such a tailor, too; quite a fashionable tailor. It 's too good for me.

BERTHA

[*Stopping her work and laughing delightedly*] Too good, father! What can be too good for you?

CALEB PLUMMER

[*Watching to see how eagerly she follows his words*] I'm half ashamed to wear it, though, upon my word! When I hear the boys say behind me, "Halloo! here's a swell!" I don't know which way to look. And when the beggar would n't go away last night, saying when I said I was a very common man, "No, your Honor! Bless your Honor, don't say that!" I was quite ashamed. I really felt as if I had n't a right to wear it.

BERTHA

[*Merrily*] I see you, father, as plainly as if I had the eyes I never want when you are with me. A blue coat —

CALEB PLUMMER

Bright blue.

BERTHA

Yes, yes! Bright blue! The color I can just remember in the blessed sky! You told me it was blue before! A bright blue coat —

CALEB PLUMMER

Made loose to the figure.

BERTHA

[*Gayly*] Made loose to the figure! and in it, you, dear father, with your merry eye, your smiling face, your free step, and your dark hair — looking so young and handsome!

CALEB PLUMMER

Halloo! halloo! I shall be vain, presently!

BERTHA

I think you are, already. I know you, father! Ha, ha, ha! I 've found you out, you see!

CALEB PLUMMER

[*Stepping back to survey his work*] There we are, as near the real thing as six penn'orth of halfpence is to sixpence. What a pity it is that the whole front of the house opens at once! If there was only a staircase in it now, and regular doors to the rooms to go in at! [*Softly*] But that 's the worst of my calling, I 'm always deluding myself, and swindling myself.

BERTHA

You are speaking quite softly. You are not tired, father?

CALEB PLUMMER

[*With feigned animation*] Tired! What should tire me, Bertha? I never was tired. What does it mean?

[*He checks himself in the midst of a yawn and hums a fragment of a lively song.*

Enter TACKLETON.

TACKLETON

What! you 're singing, are you? Go it! *I* can't sing. I can't afford to sing. I 'm glad you can. I hope you can afford to work, too. Hardly time for both, I should think.

CALEB PLUMMER

[*Whispering*] If you could only see, Bertha, how he 's winking at me! Such a man to joke! You 'd think, if you did n't know him, he was in earnest — would n't you now?

[*Bertha nods and smiles.*

TACKLETON

The bird that can sing and won't sing must be made to sing, they say. What about the owl that can't sing, and ought n't to sing, and will sing? Is there anything that he should be made to do?

CALEB PLUMMER

[*Whispering*] The extent to which he 's winking at this moment! Oh, my gracious!

BERTHA

[*Smiling*] Always merry and light-hearted with us!

TACKLETON

Oh, you 're there, are you? Poor idiot! Well, and being there — how are you?

BERTHA

Oh! well; quite well. And as happy as even you can wish me to be. As happy as you would make the whole world, if you could!

TACKLETON

Poor idiot! No gleam of reason. Not a gleam! [*Bertha takes his hand, kisses it, and lays her cheek against it. To Bertha*] What 's the matter now?

BERTHA

I stood the plant you gave me close beside my pillow when I went to sleep last night, and remembered it in my dreams. And when the day broke, and the glorious red sun — the *red* sun, father?

CALEB PLUMMER

Red in the mornings and evenings, Bertha.

BERTHA

When it rose, and the bright light I almost fear to strike myself against in walking, came into the room, I turned the little tree toward it, and blessed Heaven for making things so precious, and blessed you for sending them to cheer me!

TACKLETON

[*In an undertone*] Bedlam broke loose! We shall arrive at the strait-waistcoat and mufflers soon. We 're getting on! [*To Bertha*] Bertha! Come here.

BERTHA

Oh! I can come straight to you! You need n't guide me!

TACKLETON

Shall I tell you a secret, Bertha?

BERTHA

[*Eagerly*] If you will!

TACKLETON

This is the day on which little what 's-her-name, the spoiled child, Peerybingle's wife, pays her regular visit to you — makes her fantastic picnic here; is n't it?

BERTHA

Yes, this is the day.

TACKLETON

I thought so. I should like to join the party.

BERTHA

[*Rapturously*] Do you hear that, father?

CALEB PLUMMER

Yes, yes, I hear it, but I don't believe it. It 's one of my lies, I 've no doubt.

TACKLETON

You see I — I want to bring the Peerybingles a little more into company with May Fielding. I am going to be married to May.

BERTHA

[*Starting back*] Married!

TACKLETON

[*To himself*] She 's such an idiot that I was afraid she would n't comprehend me. [*To Bertha*] Married! Church, parson, clerk, beadle, glass coach, bells, breakfast, bridecake, favors, marrowbones, cleavers, and all the rest of the tomfoolery. A wedding, you know; a wedding. Don't you know what a wedding is?

BERTHA

[*Sadly*] I know. I understand.

TACKLETON

Do you? It 's more than I expected. Well! On that account I want to join the party, and to bring May and her mother. I 'll send in a little something or other, before the afternoon. A cold leg of mutton, or some comfortable trifle of that sort. You 'll expect me?

BERTHA

[*Standing with crossed hands, and drooping head turned away*] Yes.

TACKLETON

I don't think you will, for you seem to have forgotten all about it, already. [*To Caleb*] Caleb!

CALEB PLUMMER

Sir!

TACKLETON

Take care she does n't forget what I 'm saying to her.

CALEB PLUMMER

She never forgets. It 's one of the few things she is n't clever in.

TACKLETON

[*Shrugging his shoulders*] Every man thinks his own geese swans. Poor devil!

[*Tackleton goes out. Caleb sits at his worktable, hammering at the toys. Bertha remains standing for a time, sad and sorrowful, then sits beside Caleb.*

BERTHA

Father, I am lonely in the dark. I want my eyes, my patient, willing eyes.

CALEB PLUMMER

Here they are, always ready. They are more yours than mine, Bertha, any hour in the four-and-twenty. What shall your eyes do for you, dear?

BERTHA

Look round the room, father.

CALEB PLUMMER

All right. No sooner said than done, Bertha.

BERTHA

Tell me about it.

CALEB PLUMMER

It 's much the same as usual; homely, but very snug. The gay colors on the walls, the bright flowers on the plates and dishes, the shining wood where there are beams or panels, the general cheerfulness and neatness of the building make it very neat and pretty.

BERTHA

[*Touching him*] You have your working dress on, and are not so gallant as when you wear the handsome coat?

CALEB PLUMMER

Not quite so gallant; pretty brisk though.

BERTHA

[*Putting her arm about his neck*] Father, tell me something about May. She is very fair?

CALEB PLUMMER

She is indeed.

BERTHA

Her hair is dark, darker than mine. Her voice is sweet and musical, I know. I have often loved to hear it. Her shape —

CALEB PLUMMER

There 's not a doll 's in all the room to equal it. And her eyes! —

[*Bertha puts her hand over his mouth. Caleb coughs, and begins to sing.*

BERTHA

Our friend, father, our benefactor. I am never tired, you know, of hearing about him — now, was I ever?

CALEB PLUMMER

Of course not, and with reason.

BERTHA

Ah! With how much reason! Tell me again about him, dear father. Many times again! His face is benevolent, kind, and tender. Honest and true, I am sure it is. The manly heart that tries to cloak all favors with a show of roughness and unwillingness beats in its every look and glance.

CALEB PLUMMER

And makes it noble!

BERTHA

And makes it noble! [*Pause.*] He is older than May, father.

CALEB PLUMMER

Ye-es, he 's a little older than May, but that does n't signify.

BERTHA

Oh father, yes! To be his patient companion in infirmity and age; to be his gentle nurse in sickness, and his constant friend in suffering and sorrow; to know no weariness in working for his sake; to watch him, tend him, sit beside his bed and talk to him awake, and pray for him asleep; what privileges these would be! What opportunities for proving all her truth and devotion to him! Would she do all this, dear father?

CALEB PLUMMER

No doubt of it.

BERTHA

I love her, father; I can love her from my soul!

[*Weeps, and Caleb strokes her hair comfortingly.*

CALEB PLUMMER

Come, Bertha, cheer up. They 'll be here directly, John Peerybingle and Mary and the baby and Mr. Tackleton and May Fielding and Mrs. Fielding. We must be ready for them.

BERTHA

Surely, father, we must. You are right to make me think of others. Teach me in the sunshine of their happiness to forget my own dark clouds.

[*Wipes her eyes and assists Caleb to clear the working table and put the room in order. A knock is heard.*

TACKLETON *enters with* MAY FIELDING *and her mother, the latter bringing a majestic cap in paper.* TACKLETON *brings a leg of mutton and a tart.*

TACKLETON

Here we are, Caleb. [*To Mrs. Fielding*] This is Caleb Plummer, ma'am, and his daughter Bertha. [*To May Fielding*] May, I think you know Bertha.

MAY FIELDING

Bertha and I are old friends. [*Embraces Bertha.*

The PEERYBINGLES *enter, bringing parcels of nuts, oranges, and cakes.* TILLY SLOWBOY *has the* Baby.

TACKLETON

We are here before you.

[*Mr. and Mrs. Peerybingle greet Caleb and Bertha warmly. Tackleton leads John Peerybingle and Mrs. Peerybingle to Mrs. Fielding, who greets*

them condescendingly. Mrs. Peerybingle embraces May Fielding. The table is quickly spread, and they sit down, all except Tilly Slowboy, who holds the Baby.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Ah, May! Dear, dear, what changes! To think of the merry schooldays makes one young again.

TACKLETON

Why, you are n't particularly old, at any time; are you?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Look at my sober, plodding husband there! He adds twenty years to my age at least. [*To John*] Don't you?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Forty.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

[*To Tackleton*] How many you 'll add to May's, I don't know; she can't be much less than a hundred years of age on her next birthday. [*Tackleton makes a poor attempt at a smile.*] Dear, dear! Only to remember how we used to talk, at school, about the husbands we would choose! I don't know how young, and how handsome, and how gay, mine was not to be! And as to May's! — Ah dear! I don't know whether to laugh or cry, when I think what silly girls we were. Even the very persons themselves — real live young men — were fixed on sometimes. We little thought how such things would come about. I never fixed on John, I'm sure; I never so much as thought of him. [*To May*] And if I had told you

that you were ever to be married to Mr. Tackleton, why, you 'd have slapped me. Would n't you, May?

TACKLETON

[*Laughing*] You could n't help yourselves, for all that. You could n't resist us, you see. Here we are! Where are your gay young bridegrooms now?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Some of them are dead, and some of them forgotten. [*With increasing earnestness*] Some of them, if they could stand among us at this moment, would not believe we were the same creatures; would not believe that what they saw and heard was real, and we *could* forget them so. No! they would not believe one word of it!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Why, Dot! Little woman!

[*May sits quiet with her eyes cast down.*

MRS. FIELDING

Everybody knows that girls will be girls, and I think we had better let bygones be bygones. [*Speaks affectedly, in a thin, high voice*] As long as young people are young and thoughtless, they will probably conduct themselves like young and thoughtless persons; as the years pass they will grow older, and when they are wiser, they will have more sense. I thank Heaven I have always found May a dutiful and obedient child, for which I take no credit to myself, although I have every reason to believe my training made her what she is. That Mr. Tackleton is, in a moral point of view, an

undeniable individual is perfectly clear. That he is, in an eligible point of view, a son-in-law to be desired, [*Emphatically*] nobody in his senses can doubt. I believe Mr. Tackleton knows that the family he is about to enter, although reduced in purse, has some pretensions to gentility. I will even say that if it had not been for certain circumstances connected with the Indigo Trade, that family might have been possessed of wealth. I will not mention that my daughter has for some time rejected the suit of Mr. Tackleton. I will say, however, that I anticipate the greatest possible amount of solid bliss from this wedding. I may even say that to-morrow is the day I have lived for, expressly, and when it is over I shall have no other desire in life.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Well, Caleb, it 's time for me to be going. I must finish my rounds, and take Dot, as usual, on my way back. But before I go, I give you a toast. I give you To-morrow, the Wedding Day!

[*Mrs. Peerybingle barely puts her lips to her glass. Bertha rises hastily and leaves the table. The others soon follow.*

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Putting on his coat*] Good-by!

CALEB PLUMMER

Good-by, John.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Good-by, young shaver! [*Bends to kiss the child, which Tilly has laid down while she eats her supper*] Time will come, I suppose, when you 'll turn out into the cold, my little

friend, and leave your old father to enjoy his pipe and his rheumatics by the fire; eh? [*Looking up*] Where 's Dot?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

I 'm here, John!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Clapping his hands*] Come, come! Where 's the pipe?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

I quite forgot the pipe, John. I 'll — I 'll fill it directly. It 's soon done.

[*Takes the pipe and tobacco pouch from his overcoat pocket, fills the pipe and lights it, Tackleton looking on, the while. For some reason she is nervous and bungles badly over the performance.*

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Why, what a clumsy Dot you are, this afternoon! I could have done it better myself, I verily believe!

[*Having spoken these words good-naturedly, he goes out. Caleb stands beside Bertha and speaks softly to her, while Mrs. Fielding and May talk together in an undertone. Tackleton follows Peerybingle out. Mrs. Peerybingle sits by the fire, absorbed in thought.*

CALEB PLUMMER

Bertha! What has happened? How changed you are, my darling, in a few hours — since this morning! *You* silent and dull all day! What is it? Tell me!

BERTHA

[*Bursting into tears*] Oh, father, father! Oh, my hard, hard fate!

CALEB PLUMMER

[*Drawing his hand across his eyes*] But think how cheerful and how happy you have been, Bertha! How good, and how much loved by many people!

BERTHA

That strikes me to the heart, dear father! Always so mindful of me! Always so kind to me!

CALEB PLUMMER

To be blind, Bertha, my poor dear, is a great affliction; but —

BERTHA

I have never felt it! I have never felt it in its fulness. Never! I have sometimes wished that I could see you, or could see him — only once, dear father, only for one little minute — that I might know what it is I treasure up, and hold here! [*Laying her hands on her breast*] That I might be sure and have it right! But I have never had these feelings long. They have passed away and left me tranquil and contented.

CALEB PLUMMER

And they will again.

BERTHA

But, father! Oh, my good, gentle father, bear with me if I am wicked! This is not the sorrow that so weighs me down! Bring her to me. I cannot hold it closed and shut within myself. Bring her to me, father! May — bring May! [*May, hearing her name, comes quietly and touches Bertha*

on the arm. Bertha turns and takes both May's hands. Mrs. Peerybingle comes out of her reverie and watches what is taking place. Bertha speaks to May] Look into my face, dear heart, sweet heart! Read it with your beautiful eyes, and tell me if the truth is written on it.

MAY FIELDING

Dear Bertha, yes!

BERTHA

There is not in my soul a wish or thought that is not for your good, bright May! There is not in my soul a grateful recollection stronger than the deep remembrance which is stored there, of the many, many times when, in the full pride of sight and beauty, you have had consideration for Blind Bertha. Every blessing on your head! Light upon your happy course! Not the less, my dear May, because to-day the knowledge that you are to be his wife has wrung my heart almost to breaking! Father, May, Mary! forgive me that it is so, for the sake of all he has done to relieve the weariness of my dark life; and for the sake of the belief you have in me, when I call Heaven to witness that I could not wish him married to a wife more worthy of his goodness!

[*Drops at May's feet and hides her face in May's dress.*

CALEB PLUMMER

Great Power! have I deceived her from her cradle, but to break her heart at last!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

[*Starting up*] Come, dear Bertha! Come away with me! Give her your arm, May. See how composed she is already; and how good it is of her to mind us. [*To Bertha*] Come

Bertha! [*To Caleb*] Here 's her good father will come with her; won't you, Caleb? To—be—sure! [*Caleb and Bertha go out. Mrs. Peerybingle takes a seat beside Mrs. Fielding*] Bring me the precious baby, Tilly, and while I have it in my lap, here 's Mrs. Fielding, Tilly, will tell me all about the management of babies, and put me right in twenty points where I'm as wrong as can be. Won't you, Mrs. Fielding?

MRS. FIELDING

It 's a terrible responsibility to have the care of an infant.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

I'm sure it is, ma'am. That 's why I hope you will be kind enough to give me the benefit of your wisdom. Baby has been a remarkably healthy child, and if he should be ill, I don't know what I should do.

MRS. FIELDING

How old, did you say?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Two months and five days. Considered by the doctor a remarkably beautiful child; equal to the general run of children at five months old.

MRS. FIELDING

Has he been vaccinated?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Six weeks ago, ma'am.

MRS. FIELDING

The most important thing is flannels. You can't possibly overestimate flannels if you try.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

So I've heard, ma'am.

[*Takes her needlework from her workbag. The conversation sinks to an occasional whisper. Soon Mrs. Fielding dozes in her chair. Mrs. Peerybingle goes and sits beside May. They whisper together. May seems strangely agitated.* CALEB *and* BERTHA *return soon. Caleb sits down to his work, and Bertha takes her place beside him. She is sad and silent.* TACKLETON *returns and sits near May.*

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

It's almost time to make the tea, Bertha. I expect John back any minute.

[*Puts the cups and saucers on the table; pours the tea and serves it.*

MRS. FIELDING

[*Waking suddenly, straightening her cap*] As I was saying, May, flannels are most important; flannels, my dear. Do you hear me?

MAY

Yes, mamma.

[*A dog barks outside. Steps are heard.*

BERTHA

[*Starting up*] Whose step is that?

Enter JOHN PEERYBINGLE.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Whose step? Why, mine.

BERTHA

The other step. The man's tread behind you!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Laughing*] She is not to be deceived. [*Shouting at the door*] Come along, sir. You 'll be welcome, never fear!

The Stranger *enters.*

[*In his natural voice*] He 's not so much a stranger that you have n't seen him once, Caleb. You 'll give him house-room till we go?

CALEB PLUMMER

Oh, surely, John, and take it as an honor.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

He 's the best company on earth, to talk secrets in. I have reasonable good lungs, but he tries 'em, I can tell you. [*Shouting*] Sit down, sir. All friends here, and glad to see you! [*In his natural tone, to the others*] A chair in the chimney corner and leave to sit quite silent and look pleasantly about him is all he cares for. He 's easily pleased.

[*All this time Bertha has remained standing, her face wearing the startled, eager look with which she heard the Stranger's step outside.*

BERTHA

Father, I want you.

CALEB PLUMMER

[*Placing chairs for her and himself*] Here I am. What is it?

BERTHA

[*In a low voice*] Who has come, father? Whose step did I hear?

CALEB PLUMMER

Only a visitor that came with John. He is a stranger to all of us, my dear.

BERTHA

Describe him to me. What is he like?

CALEB PLUMMER

[*In an undertone*] He is an old man with long white hair, and very deaf. He must have been well-looking as a boy, for his eyes are dark and bright, and he has a good face. But that was long ago, for he is an old man, much older than any of us. His clothes are queer and old-fashioned.

[*Bertha listens intently, but seems disappointed, and with a sigh sits down beside Caleb, having apparently no further interest in the Stranger.*

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Standing beside his wife*] A clumsy Dot she was, this afternoon! and yet I like her somehow. See yonder, Dot! [*He motions slightly toward the Stranger. She looks down and seems disturbed.*] He's full of admiration for you! Talked of nothing else, the whole way here. He's a brave old boy. I like him for it!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

[*Glancing uneasily around the room, especially at Tackleton, who is watching her*] I wish he had a better subject, John.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Heartily*] A better subject! There 's no such thing! Come, off with the greatcoat, off with the heavy shawl — and a cozy half hour by the fire! [*To Mrs. Fielding*] My humble service, Mistress. A game at cribbage, you and I?

MRS. FIELDING

With pleasure.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

That 's hearty. [*To wife*] The cards and board, Dot.

[*The Stranger goes out. John Peerybingle and Mrs. Fielding sit down to a game of cribbage. They count and talk over the game. At first John calls his wife now and then to advise him. As the game progresses, he becomes entirely absorbed in it. Mrs. Peerybingle goes out. Tackleton walks about the room and looks out at the door. Presently he goes to the card players and lays a hand on John's shoulder.*

TACKLETON

I'm sorry to disturb you — but I want a word with you directly.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

I 'm going to deal. It 's a crisis.

TACKLETON

[*With peculiar emphasis*] It is. Come here, man.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Rising*] If Miss Fielding would kindly take my place a moment.

[*May sits down at the board, and the game continues. Tackleton takes Peerybingle by the arm, and they speak in low tones as Tackleton leads the way to the door.*

TACKLETON

Can you bear to look through that door, do you think?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Why not?

TACKLETON

[*Holding him back*] Wait a moment. Don't commit any violence. It's of no use. It's dangerous too. You're a strong-made man, and you might do murder before you know it. [*They go to the door. Tackleton opens it, and they look out. Tackleton speaks softly but very distinctly*] See them! See his arm round her waist! Not an old man, John, a young man, erect and gallant. See him bend his head to whisper in her ear. See her place the false white hair upon his head once more. What do you make of that, John Peerybingle?

[*John clenches his fist, then opens it again. He sits down upon the nearest chair with his head in his hands. Presently he gets up and begins to muffle himself in his wraps.* MRS. PEERYBINGLE *enters with* TILLY *carrying the* Baby, *all of them dressed for the ride home.*

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Now, John, dear! Good-night, May! Good-night, Bertha!

[*Kisses them blithely. Tilly walks about with the Baby, talking nonsense to it. John Peerybingle goes out.*

TILLY SLOWBOY

Did the knowledge that it was to be its wifes, then, wring its hearts almost to breaking! And did its fathers deceive it from its cradles to break its hearts at last!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Now, Tilly, give me the baby. [*To Tackleton*] Good-night, Mr. Tackleton. [*Looking around*] Where 's John, for goodness' sake?

TACKLETON

He 's going to walk beside the horse's head.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

My dear John! Walk? To-night?

TACKLETON

Yes.

[*Mrs. Peerybingle goes out, carrying the Baby. Tilly follows. Mr. Tackleton, Mrs. Fielding, and May go out, saying good-night quietly.*

SCENE III

JOHN PEERYBINGLE'S home. JOHN is sitting by the table alone, his head on his hand. TACKLETON enters, sprucely dressed as for his wedding.

TACKLETON

John Peerybingle! How do you find yourself this morning?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

I have had but a poor night, Master Tackleton, for I have been a good deal disturbed in my mind. But it 's over now! Can you spare me half an hour or so, for some private talk?

TACKLETON

I came on purpose.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

You are not married before noon, I think.

TACKLETON

No; plenty of time — plenty of time.

TILLY SLOWBOY

[*Entering with a frightened air, her eyes red with weeping*] If you please, I can't make nobody hear. I've been knocking at the old man's door, and there 's no answer. I hope nobody ain't gone and been and died if you please!

TACKLETON

Shall I go? It 's curious.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Go, if you will. [*Tackleton goes out.*

Enter TACKLETON. *He goes at once to* JOHN, *and speaks in a low tone.*

TACKLETON

John Peerybingle, I hope there has been nothing — nothing rash in the night? [*John turns upon him quickly.*] Because he 's gone, and the window 's open! I don't see any marks — to be sure it 's almost on a level with the garden; but I was afraid there might have been some — some scuffle. Eh?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Make yourself easy. He went into that room last night, without harm in word or deed from me, and no one has

entered it since. He is away of his own freewill. I 'd go out gladly at that door, and beg my bread from house to house for life, if I could so change the past that he had never come. But he has come and gone. And I have done with him.

TACKLETON

Oh! Well, I think he has got off pretty easy.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE *enters quietly and stands unseen in the corner, looking steadfastly at her husband.*

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Sitting with his face shaded by his hand a moment, before speaking*] You showed me last night, my wife, my wife that I love, secretly —

TACKLETON

And tenderly —

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Conniving at that man's disguise, and giving him opportunities of meeting her alone. I think there 's no sight I would n't rather have seen than that. I think there 's no man in the world I would n't rather have had show it to me.

TACKLETON

I confess to having had my suspicions always; and that has made me objectionable here, I know.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

But as you did show it me, and as you saw her, my wife, my wife that I love, at this disadvantage, it is right and just that you should also see with my eyes, and look into my breast, and know what my mind is upon the subject. For it 's settled, and nothing can shake it now.

TACKLETON

I suppose you know best what course you ought to pursue.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

I am a plain, rough man, with very little to recommend me. I am not a clever man, as you very well know. I am not a young man. I loved my little Dot, because I had seen her grow up, from a child, in her father's house; because I knew how precious she was; because she had been my life, for years and years. There 's many men I can't compare with, who never could have loved my little Dot like me, I think! I often thought that though I was n't good enough for her, I should make her a kind husband, and perhaps know her value better than another; and in this way I reconciled it to myself, and came to think it might be possible that we should be married. And in the end it came about, and we *were* married.

TACKLETON

Aye. [*Shaking his head significantly.*

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

I had studied myself; I had had experience of myself; I knew how much I loved her, and how happy I should be. But I had not — I feel it now — sufficiently considered her.

TACKLETON

To be sure — giddiness, frivolity, fickleness, love of admiration! Not considered! All left out of sight!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

You had best not interrupt me till you understand me; and you 're wide of doing so. [*Sternly*] If, yesterday, I 'd have

struck that man down at a blow, who dared to breathe a word against her, to-day I'd set my foot upon his face, if he was my brother!

TACKLETON

What do you mean?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Did I consider that I took her — at her age and with her beauty — from her young companions and the many scenes of which she was the ornament, in which she was the brightest little star that ever shone, to shut her up from day to day in my dull house and keep my tedious company? Did I consider how little suited I was to her sprightly humor, and how wearisome a plodding man like me must be, to one of her quick spirit? Did I consider that it was no merit in me, or claim in her, that I loved her, when everybody must, who knew her? Never. I took advantage of her hopeful nature and her cheerful disposition; and I married her. I wish I never had! For her sake; not for mine!

TACKLETON

You take a strange view of it.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Heaven bless her for the cheerful constancy with which she tried to keep the knowledge of this from me! And Heaven help me, that in my slow mind I have not found it out before! Poor child! Poor Dot! *I* not to find it out, who have seen her eyes fill with tears, when such a marriage as our own was spoken of! I, who have seen the secret trembling on her lips a hundred times, and never suspected it till last night! Poor girl! That I could ever hope she would be fond of me! That I could ever believe she was!

TACKLETON

She made a show of it. She made such a show of it, that, to tell you the truth, it was the origin of my misgivings.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*With emotion*] She has tried — I only now begin to know how hard she has tried — to be my dutiful and zealous wife. How good she has been; how much she has done; how brave and strong a heart she has; let the happiness I have known under this roof bear witness! It will be some help and comfort to me, when I am here alone.

TACKLETON

Here alone? Oh! then you do mean to take some notice of this?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

I mean to do her the greatest kindness, and make her the best reparation, in my power. I can release her from the daily pain of an unequal marriage, and the struggle to conceal it. She shall be as free as I can render her.

TACKLETON

Make *her* reparation! There must be something wrong here. You did n't say that, of course.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Shaking Tackleton violently*] Listen to me! And take care that you hear me right. Listen to me. Do I speak plainly?

TACKLETON

Very plainly indeed.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

As if I meant it?

TACKLETON

Very much as if you meant it.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

I sat upon that hearth, last night, all night. On the spot where she has often sat beside me with her sweet face looking into mine, I called up her whole life, day by day. I had her dear self in review before me. The very Cricket on the Hearth spoke of her love and faithfulness. And upon my soul she is innocent, if there is One to judge the innocent and guilty!

TACKLETON

I see you have made up your mind.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Passion and distrust have left me! Nothing but my grief remains. In an unhappy moment some old lover, better suited to her tastes and years than I — forsaken, perhaps, for me, against her will — returned. In an unhappy moment, taken by surprise, and wanting time to think of what she did, she made herself a party to his treachery, by concealing it. Last night she saw him in the interview we witnessed. It was wrong. But otherwise than this she is innocent if there is truth on earth!

TACKLETON

If that is your opinion —

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

So, let her go! Go, with my blessing for the many happy hours she has given me, and my forgiveness for any pang

she has caused me. Let her go, and have the peace of mind I wish her! She 'll never hate me. She 'll learn to like me better, when I 'm not a drag upon her, and she wears the chain I have riveted, more lightly. This is the day on which I took her, with so little thought for her enjoyment, from her home. To-day she shall return to it, and I will trouble her no more. Her father and mother will be here to-day — we had made a little plan for keeping it together — and they shall take her home. I can trust her, there, or anywhere. She leaves me without blame, and she will live so, I am sure. If I should die — I may perhaps while she is young; I have lost some courage in a few hours — she 'll find that I remembered her, and loved her to the last! This is the end of what you showed me. Now, it 's over!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

[*Keeping aloof from her husband, though speaking most earnestly*] Oh no, John, not over. Do not say it 's over yet! Not quite yet. I have heard your noble words. I could not steal away, pretending to be ignorant of what has affected me with such deep gratitude. Do not say it 's over, till the clock has struck again!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

No hand can make the clock which will strike again for me the hours that are gone. But let it be so, if you will, my dear. It will strike soon. It 's of little matter what we say. I 'd try to please you in a harder case than that.

TACKLETON

Well! I must be off, for when the clock strikes again, it 'll be necessary for me to be upon my way to church. Good

morning, John Peerybingle. I'm sorry to be deprived of the pleasure of your company. Sorry for the loss, and the occasion of it too!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

I have spoken plainly? [*Accompanying him to the door.*

TACKLETON

Why, if you compel me to make the observation, I must say that it was so very unexpected that I'm far from being likely to forget it.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

The better for us both. Good-by. I give you joy!

TACKLETON

I wish I could give it to *you*. As I can't, thank 'ee. Between ourselves — as I told you before, eh? — I don't think I shall have the less joy in my married life, because May has n't been too officious about me, and too demonstrative. Good-by! Take care of yourself.

[*Tackleton goes out, and Peerybingle follows almost immediately.*

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

[*Drying her tears*] How good John is!

[*Sobs and laughs hysterically.*

TILLY SLOWBOY

Ow, if you please, don't! It 's enough to dead and bury the baby, so it is, if you please.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Will you bring him sometimes, to see his father, Tilly, when I can't live here, and have gone to my old home?

TILLY SLOWBOY

Ow, if you please, don't! [*Bursting into a loud wail*] Ow, if you please, don't! Ow! What has everybody gone and been and done with everybody making everybody else so wretched! Ow-w-w-w!

CALEB PLUMMER *and* BERTHA *enter.* TILLY'S *wails are checked, and she stands some time silent with her mouth wide open.* MRS. PEERYBINGLE *goes to* BERTHA.

BERTHA

Mary! Not at the marriage!

CALEB PLUMMER

I told her you would not be there, mum. [*In an undertone*] I heard as much last night. But bless you, [*Taking Mrs. Peerybingle's hands*] *I* don't care for what they say. *I* don't believe them. There is n't much of me, but that little should be torn to pieces sooner than I 'd trust a word against you!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Thank you, Caleb.

CALEB PLUMMER

[*Softly*] Bertha could n't stay at home this morning. She was afraid, I know, to hear the bells ring, and could n't trust herself to be so near them on their wedding day. So we started in good time, and came here. I have been thinking of what I have done. I have been blaming myself till I hardly knew what to do or where to turn, for the distress of mind I have caused her; and I 've come to the conclusion that I 'd better, if you 'll stay with me, mum, the while, tell her the truth. You 'll stay with me the while? I don't know what effect it may have upon her; I don't know what she 'll

think of me; I don't know that she 'll ever care for her poor father afterwards. But it 's best for her that she should be undeceived, and I must bear the consequences as I deserve!

BERTHA

Mary, where is your hand? Ah! Here it is! [*Presses it to her lips with a smile and draws it through her arm*] I heard them speaking softly among themselves, last night, of some blame against you. They were wrong.

CALEB PLUMMER

They were wrong.

BERTHA

I knew it! I told them so. I scorned to hear a word! Blame *her* with justice! [*Embraces Mrs. Peerybingle*] No! I am not so blind as that. [*Caleb goes to Bertha's other side.*] I know you all, better than you think, but none so well as her. [*To Caleb*] Not even you, father. Nothing is so real and so true about me, as she is. If I could be restored to sight this instant, and not a word were spoken, I could choose her from a crowd! My sister!

CALEB PLUMMER

Bertha, my dear! I have something on my mind I want to tell you, while we three are alone. Hear me kindly. I have a confession to make to you, my darling.

BERTHA

A confession, father?

CALEB PLUMMER

I have wandered from the truth and lost myself, my child. I have wandered from the truth, intending to be kind to you, and have been cruel.

BERTHA

Cruel!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

He accuses himself too strongly, Bertha. You 'll say so, presently. You 'll be the first to tell him so.

BERTHA

He cruel to me!

CALEB PLUMMER

Not meaning it, my child, but I have been; though I never suspected it, till yesterday. My dear blind daughter, hear me and forgive me! The world you live in, heart of mine, does n't exist as I have represented it. The eyes you have trusted in have been false to you. [*Bertha draws away from him.*] Your road in life was rough, my poor one, and I meant to smooth it for you. I have altered objects, changed the characters of people, invented many things that never have been, to make you happier. I have had concealments from you, put deceptions on you, God forgive me! and surrounded you with fancies.

BERTHA

But living people are not fancies! You can't change them.

CALEB PLUMMER

I have done so, Bertha. There is one person that you know, my dove —

BERTHA

Oh, father! why do you say I know? What and whom do I know! I who have no leader! I so miserably blind!

[*Stretches out her hands as if groping her way, then covers her face with them sadly.*

CALEB PLUMMER

The marriage that takes place to-day is with a stern, sordid, grinding man; a hard master to you and me, my dear, for many years; ugly in his looks and in his nature; cold and callous always; unlike what I have painted him to you in everything.

[*Leans back in chair, with face resting on his hands.*

BERTHA

Oh, why did you ever do this? Why did you ever fill my heart so full, and then come in like Death, and tear away the objects of my love? O Heaven, how blind I am! How helpless and alone! [*Weeps silently. Speaks to Mrs. Peerybingle*] Mary, tell me what my home is; what it truly is.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

It is a poor place, Bertha; very poor and bare indeed. The house will scarcely keep out wind and rain another winter. It is as roughly shielded from the weather, Bertha, as your poor father in his sackcloth coat.

BERTHA

[*Leading Mrs. Peerybingle aside*] Those presents that I took such care of; that came almost at my wish, and were so dearly welcome to me; where did they come from? Did you send them?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

No.

BERTHA

Who then? [*As Mrs. Peerybingle does not answer, Bertha realizes her father's generous love, and covers her face with her hands in contrition*] Dear Mary, a moment, one moment.

Come this way; speak softly to me. You are true, I know. You 'd not deceive me now; would you?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

No, Bertha, indeed!

BERTHA

No, I am sure you would not. You have too much pity for me. Mary, look across the room to where we were just now — to where my father is — my father, so compassionate and loving to me — and tell me what you see.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

I see an old man sitting in a chair, and leaning sorrowfully on the back, with his face resting on his hand, as if his child should comfort him, Bertha.

BERTHA

Yes, yes, she will; go on.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

He is an old man, worn with care and work. He is a spare, dejected, thoughtful, gray-haired man. I see him now, despondent and bowed down, and striving against nothing. But, Bertha, I have seen him many times before, and striving hard in many ways for one great sacred object. And I honor his gray head, and bless him!

BERTHA

[*Kneeling before Caleb*] It is my sight restored. It is my sight! I have been blind, and now my eyes are open. I never knew him! To think I might have died, and never truly seen the father who has been so loving to me! There is not a gallant figure on this earth that I would love so dearly and

would cherish so devotedly as this! The grayer and more worn, the dearer, father! Never let them say I am blind again. There 's not a furrow in his face, there 's not a hair upon his head, that shall be forgotten in my prayers and thanks to Heaven!

CALEB PLUMMER

My Bertha!

BERTHA

And in my blindness, I believed him to be so different! And having him beside me, day by day, so mindful of me always, never dreamed of this!

CALEB PLUMMER

The fresh, smart father in the blue coat, Bertha, is gone.

BERTHA

Nothing is gone. Dearest father, no! Everything is here — in you. The father that I loved so well; the father that I never loved enough, and never knew; the benefactor whom I first began to reverence and love, because he had such sympathy for me; all are here in you. Nothing is dead to me. The soul of all that was most dear to me is here — here, with the worn face and the gray head. And I am *not* blind, father, any longer! [*Pause.*] Father, Mary.

CALEB PLUMMER

Yes, my dear, here she is.

[*Putting Mrs. Peerybingle's hand in Bertha's.*

BERTHA

There is no change in *her?* You never told me anything of *her* that was not true?

CALEB PLUMMER

I should have done it, my dear, I am afraid, if I could have made her better than she was. But I must have changed her for the worse, if I had changed her at all. Nothing could improve her, Bertha. [*Bertha embraces Mrs. Peerybingle.*

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

More changes than you think for may happen though, my dear. Changes for the better, I mean; changes for great joy to some of us. You must n't let them startle you too much, if any such should ever happen and affect you. — Are those wheels upon the road? You 've a quick ear, Bertha. Are they wheels?

BERTHA

Yes, coming very fast.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

I—I—I know you have a quick ear, because I have noticed it often, and because you were so quick to find out that strange step last night. Though why you should have said, as I very well recollect you did say, Bertha, "Whose step is that?" and why you should have taken any greater observation of it than of any other step, I don't know. Though as I said just now, there are great changes in the world — great changes; and we can't do better than prepare ourselves to be surprised at hardly anything. They are wheels indeed! Coming nearer! Nearer! Very close! And now you hear them stopping at the garden gate! And now you hear a step outside the door — the same step, Bertha, is it not? — and now —

[*Utters a wild cry of uncontrollable delight; and running up to Caleb puts her hands upon his eyes,*

as EDWARD PLUMMER *rushes in, flinging his hat into the air.* MAY *follows him.*

Is it over?

EDWARD PLUMMER

Yes!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Happily over?

EDWARD PLUMMER

Yes!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Do you recollect the voice, dear Caleb? Did you ever hear the like of it before?

CALEB PLUMMER

If my boy in the Golden South Americas was alive —

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

[*Removing her hands from his eyes and clapping them in ecstasy*] He is alive! Look at him! See where he stands before you, healthy and strong! Your own dear son! [*To Bertha*] Your own dear living, loving brother, Bertha!

[*Edward Plummer embraces his father and sister. The clock strikes twelve.* JOHN PEERYBINGLE *enters, and starts back on seeing what is happening.*

CALEB PLUMMER

Look, John! look here! See my own boy from the Golden South Americas! My own son! Him that you fitted out, and sent away yourself! Him that you were always such a friend to!

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*Advancing to seize him by the hand, but recoiling as some feature awakens a remembrance of the deaf man in the cart*] Edward! Was it you?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Now tell him all! Tell him all, Edward; and don't spare me, for nothing shall make me spare myself in his eyes, ever again.

EDWARD PLUMMER

I was the man.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

And could you steal, disguised, into the house of your old friend? There was a frank boy once — [*To Caleb*] how many years is it, Caleb, since we heard that he was dead, and had it proved, we thought? — [*To Edward*] who never would have done that.

EDWARD PLUMMER

There was a generous friend of mine, once — more a father to me than a friend — who never would have judged me, or any other man, unheard. You were he. So I am certain you will hear me now.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

[*With a troubled glance at his wife, who keeps far away from him*] Well! that 's but fair. I will.

EDWARD PLUMMER

You must know that when I left here, a boy, I was in love, and my love was returned. She was a very young girl, who perhaps — you may tell me — did n't know her own mind. But I knew mine, and I had a passion for her.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

You had! You!

EDWARD PLUMMER

Indeed I had, and she returned it. I have ever since believed she did, and now I am sure she did.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Heaven help me! This is worse than all.

EDWARD PLUMMER

Constant to her, and returning, full of hope, after many hardships and perils, to redeem my part of our old contract, I heard, twenty miles away, that she was false to me; that she had forgotten me; and had bestowed herself upon another and a richer man. I had no mind to reproach her; but I wished to see her, and to prove beyond dispute that this was true. I hoped she might have been forced into it, against her own desire and recollection. It would be small comfort, but it would be some, I thought, and on I came. That I might have the truth, the real truth; observing freely for myself, and judging for myself, without obstruction on the one hand, or presenting my own influence, if I had any, before her, on the other; I dressed myself unlike myself — you know how; and waited on the road — you know where. You had no suspicion of me; neither had — had she, [*Pointing to Mrs. Peerybingle*] until I whispered in her ear that night, and she so nearly betrayed me.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

[*Sobbing*] But when she knew that Edward was alive, and had come back, and when she knew his purpose, she advised him by all means to keep his secret close; for his old friend,

John Peerybingle, was much too open in his nature, and too clumsy in all artifice — being a clumsy man in general [*Half laughing and half crying*] — to keep it for him. And when she — that 's me, John — told him all, and how his sweetheart had believed him to be dead; and how she had at last been overpersuaded by her mother into a marriage which the silly, dear old thing called advantageous; and when she — that 's me again, John — told him they were not yet married, though close upon it, and that it would be nothing but a sacrifice if it went on, for there was no love on her side; and when he went nearly mad with joy to hear it; then she — that 's me again — said she would go between them, as she had often done before in old times, John, and would sound his sweetheart and be sure that what she — me again, John — said and thought was right. And it *was* right, John! And they were brought together, John! And they were married, John, an hour ago! And here 's the Bride! And Gruff and Tackleton may die a bachelor! And I 'm a happy little woman, May, God bless you!

[*Mrs. Peerybingle embraces May, and they look smilingly and tenderly at each other. John Peerybingle hastens toward his wife, but she stretches out her hand to stop him, and retreats as before.*

No, John, no! Hear all! Don't love me any more, John, till you 've heard every word I have to say. It was wrong to have a secret from you, John. I 'm very sorry. I did n't think it any harm, till I came and sat down by you on the little stool last night. But when I knew by what was written in your face, that you had seen me with Edward that night

at Caleb's, and when I knew what you thought, I felt how giddy and how wrong it was. But oh, dear John, how could you, could you, think so!

[*Sobs, and her husband would embrace her, but she will not permit him.*

Don't love me yet, please John! Not for a long time yet! When I was sad about this intended marriage, dear, it was because I remembered May and Edward such young lovers; and knew that her heart was far away from Tackleton. You believe that, now. Don't you, John? [*Again he starts as if to approach her; again she stops him*] No; keep there, please, John! When I laugh at you, as I sometimes do, John, and call you clumsy and a dear old goose, and names of that sort, it 's because I love you, John, so well, and take such pleasure in your ways, and would n't see you altered in the least respect to have you made a king to-morrow.

CALEB PLUMMER

Hooroar! My opinion!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

And when I speak of people being middle-aged and steady, John, and pretend that we are a humdrum couple, going on in a jog trot sort of way, it 's only because I 'm such a silly little thing, John, that I like, sometimes, to act a kind of play with baby, and make believe. [*John comes near her.*] No, don't love me for another minute or two, if you please, John! What I want most to tell you, I have kept to the last. My dear, good, generous John, when we were talking the other night about the Cricket, I had it on my lips to say that at first I did not love you quite so dearly as I do now; that

when I first came home here, I was half afraid I might n't learn to love you every bit as well as I hoped and prayed I might — being so very young, John! But, dear John, every day and hour I loved you more and more. And if I could have loved you better than I do, the noble words I heard you say this morning would have made me. But I can't. All the affection that I had — it was a great deal, John — I gave you, as you well deserve, long, long ago, and I have no more left to give. Now, my dear husband, take me to your heart again! That 's my home, John; and never, never think of sending me to any other!

[*John Peerybingle embraces his wife. Tilly Slowboy weeps copiously for joy and hands the Baby to all in succession.*

BERTHA

I hear the sound of wheels.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

It must be Gruff and Tackleton.

TACKLETON *enters, looking warm and anxious.*

TACKLETON

Why, what does this mean, John Peerybingle! There 's some mistake. I appointed Mrs. Tackleton to meet me at the church, and I 'll swear I passed her on the road, on her way here. Oh! here she is! [*To Edward Plummer*] I beg your pardon, sir; I have n't the pleasure of knowing you; but if you can do me the favor to spare this young lady, she has rather a particular engagement this morning.

EDWARD PLUMMER

But I can't spare her. I could n't think of it.

TACKLETON

What do you mean, you vagabond?

EDWARD PLUMMER

[*Smiling*] I mean, that as I can make allowance for your being vexed, I am as deaf to harsh discourse this morning as I was to all discourse last night. [*Tackleton gives a start of astonishment. Edward holds out May's left hand, showing the ring*] I am sorry, sir, that the young lady can't accompany you to church; but as she has been there once this morning, perhaps you 'll excuse her.

[*Tackleton looks hard at the third finger and takes a little piece of silver paper, apparently containing a ring, from his waistcoat pocket.*

TACKLETON

Miss Slowboy, will you have the kindness to throw that in the fire? [*She throws it in the fire awkwardly.*] Thank 'ee.

EDWARD PLUMMER

It was a previous engagement, quite an old engagement, that prevented my wife from keeping her appointment with you, I assure you.

MAY PLUMMER

Mr. Tackleton will do me the justice to acknowledge that I revealed it to him faithfully; and that I told him, many times, I never could forget it.

TACKLETON

[*Recovering his composure by an effort*] Oh, certainly! Oh, to be sure. Oh, it 's all right. It 's quite correct. Mrs. Edward Plummer, I infer?

EDWARD PLUMMER

That 's the name.

TACKLETON

Ah, I should n't have known you, sir. [*Bowing*] I give you joy, sir!

EDWARD PLUMMER

Thank 'ee.

TACKLETON

Mrs. Peerybingle, I am sorry. You have n't done me a great kindness, but, on my life, I am sorry. You are better than I thought you. [*To John*] John Peerybingle, I am sorry. You understand me; that 's enough. It 's quite correct, ladies and gentlemen all, and perfectly satisfactory. Good morning! [*Goes out.*

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Now John, now Tilly! help me to get a dinner that shall be worthy of this day and all it has brought us. [*A great bustle ensues, with John Peerybingle and his wife putting two tables together, laying the cloth, going in and out, bringing dishes and food, and Tilly getting in everybody's way with the Baby in her arms.*] We must have Mrs. Fielding, must n't we, John?

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Shall I go for her?

MAY PLUMMER

No, thank you, John, Edward and I will go. We have our peace to make, you know. [*Mr. and Mrs. Plummer go out.*

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

[*Still going back and forth, arranging the table*] I hope Mrs. Fielding won't take it very hard.

CALEB PLUMMER

She 'll come round after a while. Can't do anything else, you know, after May has the wedding ring on.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

That 's very true, Caleb. No use crying after spilt milk. I 'm sorry for Tackleton. He never deserved May, but that does n't make it any easier to lose her. — Heart alive! How late father and mother are! They were coming to dine with us on our wedding day. Tilly, give the baby to Bertha, and run out and see if they are coming.

TILLY SLOWBOY

[*Looking out*] No, missus, I don't see nothink.

BERTHA

Can't I help, Mary?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Just hold the precious baby if you will. Then Tilly can be watching.

CALEB PLUMMER

You 'll let me lend a hand.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Surely. You shall bring the chairs from the other room.

[*Caleb brings in the chairs. Everybody is busy helping.*

BERTHA

I hear wheels.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Go and look, Tilly.

TILLY SLOWBOY

[*Looking out*] Please missus, I don't see nothink again.

BERTHA

I am sure I hear wheels.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Such a quick ear you have, Bertha! Not past the corner yet, but you heard them. Look once more, Tilly.

[*Tilly looks out.*

TILLY SLOWBOY

[*Returning*] Please, missus, there 's a chaise coming up the road. [*Mrs. Peerybingle runs to the door.*

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

John, it 's Edward and May with Mrs. Fielding, and they 'll be at the gate in a minute. Run out and take the horse, do.

[*John goes out.*

MRS. FIELDING *and* MAY *enter.* MRS. FIELDING *brings her cap in a stiff paper parcel and puts it on after the greetings are over.*

CALEB PLUMMER

[*To Mrs. Fielding*] It 's very kind of you to come, ma'am.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

So I 've been telling her, Caleb. Quite an honor. I expect my own mother and father, Mrs. Fielding. They 'll be here

presently. It's time for them now. They must be nearly here.

[*Mrs. Fielding goes to the wrong door to look out.*

CALEB PLUMMER

That 's the wrong door, ma'am. They come the other way.

MRS. FIELDING

I hope I may take the liberty of looking where I please.

CALEB PLUMMER

Certainly, ma'am, certainly.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

[*At the other door*] Here they are! Here they are!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE'S *father and mother enter. They are a chubby little couple, and* MRS. PEERYBINGLE *and her mother are very like each other.* MRS. FIELDING *is condescending and dignified, but the father and mother greet her most cordially. Enter* JOHN PEERYBINGLE *and* EDWARD PLUMMER.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Now we are all together again. How 's dinner, Dot?

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

All ready, John. Only waiting for you.

[*John Peerybingle escorts Mrs. Fielding to the table. All take places. Mr. and Mrs. Peerybingle serve cordially and hospitably, and it is a merry company.*

CALEB PLUMMER

Ah, Bertha, to think that Edward has come back safe and sound after all!

BERTHA

It is almost too good to be true.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

You had a quick ear for his step last night, Bertha. You very nearly guessed our secret.

[*A knock is heard. A* Man *enters, staggering and carrying the great wedding cake on his head. He places it in the middle of the table.*

MAN

Mr. Tackleton's compliments, and as he has n't got no use for the cake himself, p'r'aps you 'll eat it. [*Goes out.*

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Well! who would have thought that of Gruff and Tackleton?

EDWARD PLUMMER

It 's very good of him, I 'm sure.

MRS. FIELDING

Perhaps it 's poisoned.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

Oh, I think not, ma'am.

BERTHA

Oh no, surely not.

EDWARD PLUMMER

He would n't do that.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

You must cut it, May.

[*As Mrs. Plummer is about to cut the cake, another knock is heard. Enter the* Man *with a huge parcel.*

MAN

Mr. Tackleton's compliments, and he 's sent a few toys for the babby. They ain't ugly.

[*Goes out. Immediately another tap is heard. Enter* TACKLETON, *hat in hand.*

TACKLETON

Mrs. Peerybingle, my house is very lonely to-night. I have not so much as a Cricket on my Hearth. I have scared them all away. Be gracious to me; let me join this happy party!

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

I'm sure you 're welcome, sir.

JOHN PEERYBINGLE

Heartily welcome, sir.

MRS. PEERYBINGLE

[*Bringing a plate for Tackleton, she pauses a moment by her husband as she passes him, and whispers*] John, you won't send me home this evening, will you?

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

CHARACTERS

Scrooge	Mrs. Fezziwig
Bob Cratchit	The Miss Fezziwigs
Fezziwig	Mrs. Cratchit
Peter	Martha
Tiny Tim	Belinda
Joe	Caroline
Fan	

Benevolent Gentlemen, Scrooge's Nephew, Marley's Ghost, Christmas Past, Schoolmaster, Apprentices, Scrooge the Lover, Father, Christmas Present, Christmas Future, Undertaker's Man, Husband, Scrooge's Fiancée, Mother, Daughter, Nephew's Wife, Charwoman, Laundress, Fiddler, Guests, Merchants, Servants, Children

ACT I

SCENE I

Ebenezer Scrooge, the miser, is sitting in his countinghouse the afternoon before Christmas. His partner, Marley, who died years ago, was as penurious as Scrooge himself; and now Scrooge carries on the business alone in the same mean, grasping spirit. Life means to him nothing but pounds, shillings, and pence.

Scrooge sits on a stool at a desk. Bob Cratchit, his clerk, sits at another desk on the other side of the room. He is shabbily dressed. A small stove stands near Scrooge's corner, with a box of coals touching his stool, that he may guard it carefully. Lighted candles are on the desks, for a dense fog prevails.

Bob Cratchit blows upon his fingers and rubs his hands, then steals to the box of coals and takes a shovelful as if to replenish the fire.

SCROOGE

[*Gruffly*] What 's the matter?

BOB CRATCHIT

[*Meekly*] I thought the fire might be getting a bit low, sir.

SCROOGE

Did I ask you to meddle with the fire?

BOB CRATCHIT

[*Retreating*] No, sir, not at all; not at all, sir.

SCROOGE

Don't be an idiot if you can help it. Coals cost money, and money is too good a thing to waste.

[*Bob Cratchit tries to warm his fingers at the candle. He glances at Scrooge, who is engaged at his desk, and once more goes noiselessly to the coals. Scrooge turns round in indignation.*

I see very plainly that you and I must part. Part! Do you hear?

BOB CRATCHIT

Yes, sir. Certainly, sir.

[*Bob goes back to his desk, but presently goes out and returns with a white comforter, which he winds about his neck. From time to time he blows upon his fingers and wraps them for a moment in the long ends of his comforter. Enter* SCROOGE'S NEPHEW *with a brisk step and a smiling, genial face.*

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

A Merry Christmas, uncle!

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug!

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

[*Gayly*] Christmas a humbug, uncle! You don't mean that, I am sure!

SCROOGE

I do. Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You 're poor enough.

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

Come, then! What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You 're rich enough.

SCROOGE

Bah! Humbug!

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

Don't be cross, uncle!

SCROOGE

What else can I be, when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon Merry Christmas! What 's Christmas to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly run through his heart. He should!

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

Uncle!

SCROOGE

Nephew! keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

Keep it! But you don't keep it.

SCROOGE

Let me leave it alone, then. Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say, Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round — apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that — as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good; and I say, God bless it!

[*Bob Cratchit claps his hands in applause.*

SCROOGE

[*To Bob Cratchit*] Let me hear another sound from *you*, and you 'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation. [*Turning to his Nephew*] You 're a powerful speaker, sir. I wonder you don't go into Parliament.

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

Don't be angry, uncle. Come! dine with us to-morrow.

SCROOGE

I 'll eat my own head first.

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

But why? Why?

SCROOGE

Why did you get married?

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

Because I fell in love.

SCROOGE

Because you fell in love! Good afternoon!

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

Nay, uncle, but you never came to see me before that happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?

SCROOGE

Good afternoon.

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?

SCROOGE

Good afternoon.

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humor to the last. So a Merry Christmas, uncle!

SCROOGE

Good afternoon!

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

And a Happy New Year!

SCROOGE

Good afternoon! [*Nephew shakes hands with Bob Cratchit and wishes him a Merry Christmas. Bob cordially returns the greeting and goes out with Nephew.*] There 's another fellow, my clerk, with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a Merry Christmas! I'll retire to Bedlam.

BOB CRATCHIT *enters, ushering in the two* Benevolent Gentlemen. *They are portly gentlemen, genial and very courteous. They have books and papers in their hands, and stand with their hats off during the visit.*

FIRST GENTLEMAN

[*Referring to his list*] Scrooge and Marley's, I believe. Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?

SCROOGE

[*Very bluntly*] Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

[*Presenting his card*] We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner.

SCROOGE

[*Shaking his head and returning the card*] I believe your errand does not interest me.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

[*Taking up a pen and offering it to Scrooge*] At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge, it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds are in want of common comforts, sir.

SCROOGE

Are there no prisons?

FIRST GENTLEMAN

[*Laying the pen down*] Plenty of prisons.

SCROOGE

And the Union workhouses? Are they still in operation?

SECOND GENTLEMAN

They are. I wish we could say they were not.

SCROOGE

The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigor, then?

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Both very busy, sir.

SCROOGE

Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course. I'm very glad to hear it.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude, a few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy the poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We chose this time, because it is a time of all others, when Want suffers keenly and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?

SCROOGE

Nothing!

SECOND GENTLEMAN

You wish to be anonymous?

SCROOGE

I wish to be left alone. Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned — they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Many can't go there; and many would rather die.

SCROOGE

If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides — excuse me — I don't know that.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

But you might know it.

SCROOGE

It 's not my business. It 's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!

[*The Benevolent Gentlemen bow and go out. Scrooge and Bob Cratchit work silently, now and then blotting a page in the ledger, or ruling a line. The distant singing of carols is heard; then a voice is heard near, as if at the keyhole.*

VOICE

God bless you, merry gentlemen!
May nothing you dismay!

[*Scrooge seizes his ruler and goes angrily toward the door. The song stops suddenly, and swiftly retreating footsteps are heard.*

SCROOGE

[*Closing his ledger and wiping his pen*] You 'll want all day to-morrow, I suppose?

BOB CRATCHIT

[*Clearing away his work rapidly, blowing out his candle, and putting on his hat*] If quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE

It 's not convenient, and it 's not fair. If I was to stop half a crown for it, you 'd think yourself ill used, I 'll be

bound? [*Bob smiles faintly and winds the ends of his comforter about his hands.*] And yet you don't think *me* ill used, when I pay a day's wages for no work.

BOB CRATCHIT

Christmas comes but once a year, sir.

SCROOGE

[*Putting on his greatcoat and buttoning it to the chin*] A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December! But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning.

BOB CRATCHIT

Yes, sir.

[*They go out. Bob has no greatcoat, but buttons his coat and puts his hands in his pockets.*

SCENE II

The sitting room at SCROOGE'S home, a suite of rooms which formerly belonged to MARLEY, his deceased partner. SCROOGE enters, carrying a candle in his hand, wearing his coat and hat, having just come from his counting house. His face has a startled look, and he walks across the room to the opposite door, where he peers out, then comes back and makes a tour of the room, looking under the sofa and table, and shaking his dressing gown, which hangs against the wall.

SCROOGE

[*Locking the door at which he entered*] Humbug! Yet that *was* Marley's face on the door, I swear it was. I saw it plainly. The knocker was gone, and Marley's face was where the knocker ought to be. [*Takes off his cravat, puts on his*

dressing gown and slippers, also his night cap, and sits down before the fire with a basin of gruel, which he sips slowly. Suddenly a bell in the room begins to ring, and, to Scrooge's astonishment and dismay, all the bells in the house ring loudly. Soon they stop suddenly, and a clanking noise is heard, as if some person were dragging a heavy chain outside. The noise grows louder and nearer.] It 's humbug still! I won't believe it.

MARLEY'S GHOST *enters dressed in waistcoat, tights, and boots with tassels. The hair is in a pigtail. About the waist is clasped a long chain made of cash boxes, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses, wrought in steel. The head is wound about with a handkerchief.*

How now! What do you want with me?

MARLEY'S GHOST

Much!

SCROOGE

Who are you?

MARLEY'S GHOST

Ask me who I *was*.

SCROOGE

Who *were* you then? You 're particular, for a shade.

MARLEY'S GHOST

In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley.

SCROOGE

Can you — can you sit down?

MARLEY'S GHOST

I can.

SCROOGE

Do it, then.

MARLEY'S GHOST

[*Sitting down*] You don't believe in me.

SCROOGE

I don't.

MARLEY'S GHOST

What evidence would you have of my reality beyond that of your senses?

SCROOGE

I don't know.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Why do you doubt your senses?

SCROOGE

Because a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There 's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are! [*During this conversation, Marley's Ghost sits fixed and motionless, but the hair, skirts, and tassels are agitated as if blown by a fiery blast. Scrooge continues his facetious remarks as a means of lessening his own terror*] You see this toothpick?

MARLEY'S GHOST

I do.

SCROOGE

You are not looking at it.

MARLEY'S GHOST

But I see it, notwithstanding.

SCROOGE

Well! I have but to swallow this, and be for the rest of my days persecuted by a legion of goblins, all of my own creation. Humbug, I tell you! humbug! [*At these words the Ghost raises a frightful cry and shakes its chain with such a hideous noise that Scrooge holds on tight to his chair, to save himself from falling in a swoon. He drops upon his knees and clasps his hands before his face*] Mercy! Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?

MARLEY'S GHOST

Man of the worldly mind! do you believe in me or not?

SCROOGE

I do; I must. But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?

MARLEY'S GHOST

It is required of every man, that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world — oh, woe is me! — and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!

[*The Spirit utters a cry, shaking its chain and wringing its hands.*

SCROOGE

You are fettered. Tell me why.

MARLEY'S GHOST

[*Fingering the chain*] I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my

own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. [*Holding it up*] Is its pattern strange to *you?* Or would you know the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have labored on it since. It is a ponderous chain!

SCROOGE

Jacob, old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob!

MARLEY'S GHOST

I have none to give. It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men. Nor can I tell you what I would. A very little more is all that is permitted to me. I cannot rest; I cannot stay; I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting house — mark me! — in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole; and weary journeys lie before me!

SCROOGE

You must have been very slow about it, Jacob.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Slow!

SCROOGE

Seven years dead, and traveling all the time!

MARLEY'S GHOST

The whole time. No rest, no peace; incessant torture of remorse.

SCROOGE

You travel fast?

MARLEY'S GHOST

On the wings of the wind.

SCROOGE

You might have got over a great quantity of ground in seven years.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Oh! captive, bound, and double ironed, not to know that ages of incessant labor by immortal creatures for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed! Not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness! Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!

SCROOGE

But you were always a good man of business, Jacob.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Business! Mankind was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business! [*Holds up its chain at arm's length and flings it heavily on the ground again*] At this time of the rolling year, I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode! Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted *me?* Hear me! My time is nearly gone.

SCROOGE

I will, but don't be hard upon me! Don't be flowery, Jacob! Pray!

MARLEY'S GHOST

How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day. [*Scrooge wipes the perspiration from his brow with a look of horror.*] That is no light part of my penance. I am here to-night to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE

You were always a good friend to me. Thank 'ee!

MARLEY'S GHOST

You will be haunted by Three Spirits.

SCROOGE

[*In a faltering voice*] Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?

MARLEY'S GHOST

It is.

SCROOGE

I — I think I'd rather not.

MARLEY'S GHOST

Without their visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first to-morrow, when the bell tolls One.

SCROOGE

Could n't I take 'em all at once, and have it over, Jacob?

Expect the second on the next night at the same hour; the third upon the next night, when the last stroke of Twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more; and look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us!

[*The Spirit winds its chain over its arm and walks backward toward the window. This rises a little at every step of the Spirit, so that it is wide open when the Spirit reaches it. The Spirit beckons Scrooge, and he approaches to within two paces, when Scrooge stops in obedience to a warning hand held up. Confused noises are heard without, incoherent sounds of lamentation and regret, sorrowful wailings. Marley's Ghost disappears through the window, and Scrooge looks out for a moment. He closes the window, tries the door and finds it locked, stands a moment lost in thought, his hands in his pockets, then lies down upon the sofa and falls asleep.*

ACT II

SCENE I

SCROOGE'S room. He lies on the sofa as at the close of the previous scene. The clock strikes one. Instantly light flashes up in the room, and the GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST enters. Its figure is that of a child, and its face is smooth and blooming, but the hair is long and white. It wears a white tunic trimmed with flowers, and holds a branch of holly. The GHOST'S head is surrounded by rays of light, and, to cover these at will, it carries under its arm a great extinguisher. Light also issues from the glittering belt which fastens the tunic.

SCROOGE

Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?

CHRISTMAS PAST

I am.

[*The Spirit's voice is soft and gentle, and gives the effect of coming from a distance.*

SCROOGE

Who and what are you?

CHRISTMAS PAST

I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE

Long Past?

CHRISTMAS PAST

No. Your past.

SCROOGE

Will you have the goodness to be covered, sir?

CHRISTMAS PAST

What! would you so soon put out, with worldly hands, the light I give? Is it not enough that you are one of those whose passions made this cap, and force me through whole trains of years to wear it low upon my brow?

SCROOGE

I would not willingly offend you, Spirit, and if I ever dimmed your light in the past, I did it ignorantly. What brings you back to earth to-night?

CHRISTMAS PAST

Your welfare!

SCROOGE

I am much obliged, but perhaps a night of unbroken rest would have been more conducive to my welfare.

CHRISTMAS PAST

Your reclamation, then. Take heed! [*Grasping Scrooge by the arm*] Rise and walk with me!

[*Leads Scrooge toward the window.*

SCROOGE

[*Clasping the Spirit's robe in supplication*] I am a mortal, and liable to fall.

CHRISTMAS PAST

[*Laying its hand on Scrooge's heart*] Bear but a touch of my hand there, and you shall be upheld in more than this!

[*They go out together.*

SCENE II

The GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST now shows SCROOGE incidents from his own past life. This scene shows the school where SCROOGE as a boy had spent a forlorn, lonely Christmas, after the other boys had gone home for happy holidays.

In a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain deal forms and desks, a boy sits reading the Arabian Nights.

SCROOGE *and* CHRISTMAS PAST *enter and stand just within the doorway.* CHRISTMAS PAST *touches* SCROOGE *on the arm and points to the boy, who reads intently, not noticing them.*

CHRISTMAS PAST

The school is not quite deserted. A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still.

SCROOGE

[*Sighing*] I know it. He's reading about Ali Baba. Dear old honest Ali Baba! I remember. And Valentine and his wild brother Orson. And what's his name, who was put down asleep at the Gate of Damascus. And the Sultan's Groom, turned upside down by the Genie. Served him right. I'm glad of it. What business had *he* to be married to the Princess! The boy read about Robinson Crusoe too, that vacation, and the parrot, and Friday, running for his life to the little creek. Poor boy!

[*Sighs again and dries his eyes with his cuff, then looks about him, putting his hand in his pocket.*

CHRISTMAS PAST

What's the matter?

SCROOGE

Nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something: that's all.

CHRISTMAS PAST

[*Smiling and waving its hand*] Let us see another Christmas.

[*The Boy lays his book aside and walks up and down despairingly, putting his handkerchief to his eyes more than once. Scrooge looks at the Ghost and, with a mournful shaking of his head, glances anxiously toward the door. Enter* FAN, *the Boy's sister. She is much younger than he. Coming in quickly, she puts her arms about him.*

FAN

I have come to bring you home, dear brother! [*Clapping her hands*] To bring you home, home, home!

BOY

Home, little Fan?

FAN

Yes! [*With glee*] Home, for good and all. Home, for ever and ever. Father is so much kinder than he used to be, that home 's like Heaven! He spoke so gently to me one dear night when I was going to bed, that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home; and he said yes, you should; and sent me in a coach to bring you. And you 're to be a man! and are never to come back here; but first, we 're to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world.

BOY

You are quite a woman, little Fan!

[*She claps her hands and laughs, and tries to touch his head; but, being too little, laughs again, and stands on tiptoe to embrace him, then draws him toward the door.*

SCHOOLMASTER

[*Outside*] Bring down Master Scrooge's box, there!

The SCHOOLMASTER *enters.*

SCHOOLMASTER

Well, Scrooge, so you 're going to leave us.

[*Shakes hands with them.*

A Man *enters.*

All ready, sir.

[*The Boy and Girl bow and smile as they hasten out joyfully.*

CHRISTMAS PAST

Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered, but she had a large heart!

SCROOGE

So she had; you 're right. I will not gainsay it, Spirit. God forbid!

CHRISTMAS PAST

She died a woman, and had, as I think, children.

SCROOGE

One child.

CHRISTMAS PAST

True; your nephew!

SCROOGE

[*Uneasily*] Yes.

CHRISTMAS PAST

I have other things to show you. Follow me.

[*They go out together.*

SCENE III

The warehouse in which SCROOGE formerly worked as apprentice to FEZZIWIG. At a high desk sits FEZZIWIG himself, a jolly old gentleman in a wig.

CHRISTMAS PAST *and* SCROOGE *enter and stand unnoticed in a corner.*

CHRISTMAS PAST

Do you know the place?

SCROOGE

Know it! Was I apprenticed here! Why, it 's old Fezziwig! Bless his heart; it 's Fezziwig alive again!

FEZZIWIG

[*Looking at his watch and laying down his pen*] Seven o'clock! [*Rubs his hands, smooths his waistcoat, and smiles delightedly*] Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!

Enter the two apprentices, SCROOGE *and* DICK WILKINS.

SCROOGE

[*Softly*] Dick Wilkins, to be sure! Bless me, yes. There he is. He was very much attached to me, was Dick. Poor Dick! Dear, dear! We were apprentices together.

FEZZIWIG

Yo ho, my boys! No more work to-night. Christmas Eve, Dick! Christmas, Ebenezer! [*Clapping his hands briskly*] Let 's have the shutters up, before a man can say Jack Robinson! [*The two young men go out with the wooden shutters, and come back directly, panting with their exertions. Fezziwig gets down from his desk nimbly*] Hilli-ho! Clear away, my lads, and let 's have lots of room here! Hilli-ho, Dick! Chirrup, Ebenezer!

[*The boys work gayly and rapidly while Fezziwig stands looking on. Every movable is packed off; the floor is swept and watered, and the warehouse is transformed into a ballroom. A* Fiddler *comes in with a music book and, taking his place at the high desk, begins tuning his fiddle.* MRS. FEZZIWIG *enters, one vast substantial*

smile, with the three Miss Fezziwigs *beaming and lovable, followed by six young* Suitors, *and the young* Men *and* Women *employed in the business; the* Housemaid *and the* Baker; *the* Cook *and the* Milkman; *the* Boy *from over the way, and the* Girl *from next door but one — some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling. They dance, twenty couples at once; hands half round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again; round and round. Refreshments are served. They dance again, Sir Roger de Coverley, with Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig head couple. When the dance is over, Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig stand on either side of the door, and, shaking hands with all their guests as they go out, wish them individually a Merry Christmas very heartily. The two apprentices go last. Scrooge and Christmas Past have watched all this, Scrooge showing strong interest and much emotion, entering into everything eagerly, though silently. At last they are left alone.*

CHRISTMAS PAST

[*Looking at Scrooge, the light upon its head burning full and clear*] A small matter, to make these silly folks so full of gratitude.

SCROOGE

Small!

CHRISTMAS PAST

Why! Is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money, three or four perhaps. Is that much for him?

SCROOGE

It is n't that; it is n't that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up: what then? The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.

[*He stops, feeling the Spirit's earnest look upon him.*

CHRISTMAS PAST

What is the matter?

SCROOGE

Nothing particular.

CHRISTMAS PAST

Something, I think.

SCROOGE

No, no. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now. That 's all.

CHRISTMAS PAST

My time grows short. Hasten with me. [*They go out.*

SCENE IV

SCROOGE finds himself with CHRISTMAS PAST in a room where sits a fair Young Girl in a mourning dress, beside a Young Man, his former self. She wipes the tears from her eyes.

GIRL

[*Softly*] It matters little, to you very little. Another idol has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve.

YOUNG MAN

What idol has displaced you?

GIRL

A golden one.

YOUNG MAN

This is the even-handed dealing of the world! There is nothing on which it is so hard as poverty, and there is nothing it professes to condemn with such severity as the pursuit of wealth!

GIRL

You fear the world too much. All your other hopes have merged in the hope of being beyond its sordid reproach. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master passion, Gain, engrosses you. Have I not?

YOUNG MAN

What then? Even if I have grown so much wiser, what then? I am not changed toward you. [*She shakes her head.*] Am I?

GIRL

Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor, and content to be so, until, in good season, we could improve our worldly fortune by our patient industry. You *are* changed. When it was made, you were another man.

YOUNG MAN

[*Impatiently*] I was a boy.

GIRL

Your own feeling tells you that you were not what you are. I am. That which promised happiness when we were one in heart is fraught with misery now that we are two. How often

and how keenly I have thought of this, I will not say. It is enough that I *have* thought of it, and can release you.

YOUNG MAN

Have I ever sought release?

GIRL

In words, no, — never.

YOUNG MAN

In what, then?

GIRL

In a changed nature, in an altered spirit, in another atmosphere of life, another hope as its great end; in everything that made my love of any worth or value in your sight. If this had never been between us, tell me, would you seek me out and try to win me now? Ah, no!

YOUNG MAN

You think not.

GIRL

I would gladly think otherwise if I could, Heaven knows! When *I* have learned a truth like this, I know how strong and irresistible it must be. But if you were free to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, can even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl — you who, in your very confidence with her, weigh everything by Gain; or, choosing her, if for a moment you were false enough to your one guiding principle to do so, do I not know that your repentance and regret would surely follow? I do; and I release you, with a full heart, for the love of him you once were. [*He seems about to speak, but with her head turned from him she continues.*] You may — the memory of what is past half makes me hope you will —

have pain in this. A very, very brief time, and you will dismiss the recollection of it gladly, as an unprofitable dream from which it happened well that you awoke. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!

SCROOGE

[*Softly*] Spirit! show me no more! Conduct me home. Why do you delight to torture me?

CHRISTMAS PAST

[*Softly*] One shadow more!

SCROOGE

No more! no more! I don't wish to see it. Show me no more.

[*The Spirit pinions him in both arms, and they leave the room together.*

SCENE V

A comfortable room, not very large or handsome, but full of cheer. SCROOGE and CHRISTMAS PAST are standing in a corner. Beside a table sits a beautiful young Girl, so like the last that SCROOGE believes it is the same, until he sees her, now a comely matron, sitting opposite her daughter. Children are playing in the room, and the Daughter soon joins their sport. The Mother looks on, smiling.

Steps are heard outside. The Children hasten towards the door, carrying the Girl with them. The Father enters, laughing and laden with Christmas presents. The Children dance and shriek with joy. They hasten to scale him with chairs for ladders, dive into his pockets, and despoil him of brown-paper parcels. They shout with wonder and delight as each new package of toys is opened.

FIRST CHILD

Oh, mamma! little Tom is putting the doll's frying pan into his mouth!

SECOND CHILD

He 's swallowed the wooden turkey and the platter too.

[*The Mother rushes to little Tom, tries to put her finger in his mouth, and pounds him on the back, talking to him, meanwhile, affectionately and anxiously.*

THIRD CHILD

[*Holding up the missing turkey glued to its platter, and shouting in a shrill voice*] Here it is; I found it on the floor!

[*The Mother hugs the child; the Children come and pat it.*

MOTHER

Now children, it 's time you were in bed.

The Maid *enters for the children.*

FIRST CHILD

It 's too early.

SECOND CHILD

I want to play with my horse.

THIRD CHILD

I want to read my book.

FATHER

To-morrow will be here before you know it. Be good, and don't make Jane wait.

MOTHER

You may take your horse to bed with you.

[*The Children exclaim delightedly, fill their arms with favorite toys, kiss their Father and Mother good night, and straggle off to bed, yawning and*

rubbing their eyes. The master of the house sits down near his wife; his Daughter leans on his chair. Scrooge watches them closely and wipes his eyes.

FATHER

[*Smiling*] Belle, I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon.

MOTHER

Who was it?

FATHER

Guess!

MOTHER

[*Smiling*] How can I? Was it Mr. Scrooge?

FATHER

Mr. Scrooge it was. I passed his office window; and as it was not shut up, and he had a candle inside, I could scarcely help seeing him. His partner lies upon the point of death, I hear; and there he sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe.

SCROOGE

[*Softly*] Spirit! remove me from this place.

CHRISTMAS PAST

[*Softly*] I told you these were shadows of the things that have been. That they are what they are, do not blame me!

SCROOGE

Remove me! I cannot bear it! [*Struggles with the Spirit*] Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!

[*They pass out.*

ACT III

SCENE I

SCROOGE'S room. SCROOGE lies upon the sofa in the dim light, and as the clock strikes one, the room becomes dazzingly bright.

The GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT *enters, clothed in a green robe or mantle bordered with white fur. On its head is a holly wreath, set here and there with shining icicles. Its dark brown curls are long and free; free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanor, and its joyful air. Girded about it is an ancient scabbard, empty, and eaten up with rust.*

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

You have never seen the like of me before!

SCROOGE

Never.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Have never walked forth with the younger members of my family; meaning (for I am very young) my elder brothers born in these later years?

SCROOGE

I don't think I have. I am afraid I have not. Have you had many brothers, Spirit?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

More than eighteen hundred.

SCROOGE

A tremendous family to provide for! [*The Ghost rises.*] Spirit, conduct me where you will. I went forth last night

on compulsion, and I learned a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Touch my robe!

[*Scrooge grasps the robe, and they go out.*

SCENE II

BOB CRATCHIT'S home. MRS. CRATCHIT, rather poorly dressed but brave in ribbons, is laying the cloth, assisted by BELINDA CRATCHIT, second of her daughters, also brave in ribbons. MASTER PETER CRATCHIT, wearing his father's shirt collar, and continually getting the corners into his mouth, plunges a fork into the saucepan of potatoes.

Enter SCROOGE *and* CHRISTMAS PRESENT. *They stand apart and speak in low tones. The* SPIRIT *smiles and waves its torch.*

SCROOGE

Why do you wave your torch?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I sprinkle incense on the Christmas feast.

SCROOGE

Is there a peculiar flavor in what you sprinkle from your torch?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

There is. My own.

SCROOGE

Would it apply to any kind of dinner on this day?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

To any kindly given. To a poor one most.

SCROOGE

Why to a poor one most?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

Because a poor one needs it most.

A Boy *and* Girl *come rushing in.*

BOY

[*In a shrill, piping voice*] Oh, mother, we smelt our goose in the baker's!

GIRL

[*Clasping her hands ecstatically*] It was our very own goose, mother; we knew it by the sage.

BOY

And the onions!

BOY AND GIRL

[*Skipping across the room, hand in hand, shouting*] Our goose! our goose! our very own goose!

[*Peter catches them.*

MRS. CRATCHIT

[*In a penetrating but very cheery voice*] What has ever got your precious father, then? And your brother, Tiny Tim? And your sister Martha was n't as late last Christmas Day by half an hour!

Enter MARTHA *in coat and hat.*

MARTHA

Here 's Martha, mother!

GIRL

Here 's Martha, mother!

BOY

Hurrah! there 's *such* a goose, Martha!

MRS. CRATCHIT

[*Kissing Martha repeatedly, and taking off her things with affectionate haste*] Why, bless your heart alive, my dear, how late you are!

MARTHA

We 'd a deal of work to finish last night, and had to clear away this morning, mother!

MRS. CRATCHIT

Well! never mind so long as you are come. Sit down before the fire, my dear, and have a warm.

BOY

No, no! father 's coming.

[*The Boy and Girl jump and dance about.*

GIRL

Hear him? Hide, Martha, hide! [*Martha hides.*

Bob *enters in threadbare clothes, without an overcoat, wearing his long white comforter. On* Bob's *shoulder is* Tiny Tim *with his crutch.*

BOB CRATCHIT

[*Looking round the room*] Why, where 's our Martha?

MRS. CRATCHIT

Not coming.

BOB CRATCHIT

Not coming! not coming upon Christmas Day!

[*Martha, not liking to see him disappointed, if only for a joke, comes out prematurely from her hiding place, and runs to him.*

BOY

Come out into the wash house, Tiny Tim, and hear the pudding.

GIRL

It 's singing ever so!

[*She jumps up and down. They go out with Tiny Tim.*

MRS. CRATCHIT

Martha not coming on Christmas Day! I wonder at your believing it. I do indeed.

BOB CRATCHIT

I'm not saying I wanted to believe it, am I? [*Patting Martha's shoulder*] It would be a poor Christmas without Martha.

MRS. CRATCHIT

And how did little Tim behave?

BOB CRATCHIT

He was as good as gold, and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful, sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. [*In a tremulous voice*] He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see.

MRS. CRATCHIT

[*Wiping her eyes on her apron*] Dear heart! And was n't that just like Tiny Tim!

BOB CRATCHIT

[*Very tremulously*] I think he 's growing strong and hearty, mother, strong and hearty.

Enter PETER, *proudly bearing the goose, with the* Boy *and* Girl *dancing and shouting with delight, and* TINY TIM. MARTHA *leads* TINY TIM *to the little stool beside his father.* BOB *puts his arm about* TIM. MRS. CRATCHIT *makes the gravy hissing hot;* PETER *mashes the potatoes with incredible vigor;* BELINDA *sweetens the apple sauce;* MARTHA *dusts the hot plates. The* Boy *and* Girl *incessantly get in everybody's way, talking to each other in a high key. They place the chairs some time before they are needed, then stand upon their own, surveying the scene, and flourishing their spoons.*

MRS. CRATCHIT

Children, you make me that nervous that I don't know what I'm doing. Put your spoons in your mouths, and keep quiet till dinner is ready.

[*The Boy and Girl suddenly drop into their chairs, and cram spoons into their mouths. Bob and Tim sit quietly watching the others. Sometimes Bob stoops and says a word to Tim, who smiles in answer. At length all sit down, Tiny Tim next to Bob at a corner, the table being particularly small. There is a breathless pause, as*

Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving knife, prepares to plunge it in the breast. When she does, a murmur of delight is heard all round the board.

BOY

Look at it! look at it!

GIRL

Oh! oh! oh!

[*Boy and Girl wave their spoons and beat them together.*

TINY TIM

[*Beating on the table with the handle of his knife and shouting feebly*] Hurrah! hurrah!

BOB CRATCHIT

It 's a wonderful goose, mother, and the stuffing is quite uncommon.

MARTHA

Yes, the stuffing is so tender, and the goose so well seasoned! Dear me! what am I saying? The stuffing is so well cooked, and the goose is so well seasoned! Dear me! that 's not it either.

PETER

Give it up, Martha. This is no well-seasoned goose. This bird is nobody's grandfather, I tell you that.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Your father always was a wonderful hand at picking out a goose. A little more stuffing for Tiny Tim. [*To Bob Cratchit*] Pass his plate, father.

BOB CRATCHIT

[*After a pause*] What I say is that the best bird in the world may be spoiled by the cook.

BELINDA

Especially if it 's underdone.

PETER

Or overdone.

BOB CRATCHIT

It 's surprising what a lot of troubles may happen to a goose after it 's safe home from market.

GIRL

May I have some mashed potato, ma ?

BOY

May I have a wing, ma ?

MRS. CRATCHIT

There does n't happen to be another wing, my dear.

PETER

This goose did n't have but two.

MRS. CRATCHIT

But here 's an elegant bone for you.

PETER

Very stingy of a fowl, I call it. He never will have but two wings and two drumsticks.

MRS. CRATCHIT

And the wonderful part is that there 's always some left.

MARTHA

That 's because ma is such a good carver. She always manages that there shall be some left.

MRS. CRATCHIT

It just happens so. [*To Peter*] Some apple sauce, Peter? [*To Martha*] Martha, pass the gravy to your father.

GIRL

Ma, if it was Christmas every day, would there be a goose every day?

MRS. CRATCHIT

Heart alive! what questions you do ask, to be sure! [*To Martha*] Martha, will you wipe that child's face? She 's covered with sage and onion to her eyebrows.

BOY

Well, sis, you are a sight, and no mistake.

MRS. CRATCHIT

[*To the Boy*] And you 're quite as bad, my love. Here! [*Wipes the Boy's face*] Will nobody have any more goose? See, we have n't ate it all at last. [*Lifts the platter triumphantly, showing a tiny bone remaining. To Belinda*] Change the plates, Belinda, love.

BELINDA

[*Rising*] Yes, ma. [*Changes the plates briskly.*

MRS. CRATCHIT

[*Rising*] I 'll go for the pudding.

MARTHA

Let me help you.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Thank you, my dear, but I could n't bear it. I could n't, indeed. I must be alone. [*Goes out.*

BELINDA

I suppose ma 's afraid it may n't be done.

MARTHA

Or if she was flustered by too many asking questions, she might break it in the turning out.

BOY

Suppose the pudding was stolen!

BELINDA

How could anybody steal it?

PETER

Nothing easier; get over the wall of the back yard, and run off with it while we were busy with the goose. [*With a waggish look at the Boy*] Now I think of it, I heard a noise in the kitchen. [*The Boy looks alarmed.*

GIRL

[*Whimpering*] Has anybody stolen our pudding?

[*Puts her arm up to her face and begins to cry audibly.*

BOB CRATCHIT

[*Patting the child*] There, there, sis! It 's only Peter's joke. Never you be afraid about the pudding.

MRS. CRATCHIT *enters, flushed, but smiling proudly, carrying the small Christmas pudding, with holly stuck in the*

top. The Boy *and* Girl *and* TINY TIM *give exclamations of delight. The older ones regard it with great interest and respect.* MRS. CRATCHIT *serves.*

BOB CRATCHIT

[*After tasting*] My dear, I regard this as your greatest success since our marriage.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Now that the weight is off my mind, I will confess I had my doubts about the flour.

MARTHA

Not a bit too much, mother.

BELINDA

Nor yet too little.

PETER

The flavor is certainly remarkable. I never ate anything like it.

TINY TIM

I'm sorry for the poor people who have n't any pudding.

[*At these words the impressionable Girl breaks out crying again. Mrs. Cratchit soothes her.*

BOB CRATCHIT

[*Watching the Girl*] It 's perfectly extraordinary, the amount of sympathy that child has.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Peter, my love, the punch. [*To Belinda*] The glasses, Belinda.

[*Peter and Belinda go out. Boy goes behind Girl and tickles her ear. She brushes it several times without looking up, then discovers the trick and laughs.*

MARTHA

[*To Boy*] Don't bother the child.

BOY

Who's bothering?

Enter PETER *and* BELINDA *with a pitcher of punch, two tumblers, and a custard cup without a handle.* BOB *serves the punch.*

BOB CRATCHIT

A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!

THE FAMILY

God bless us!

TINY TIM

God bless us every one!

[*Bob pats Tiny Tim on the shoulder. They drink. Tiny Tim's stool is close to his father's side. Bob holds Tim's hand lovingly.*

[*Christmas Present and Scrooge, who have been standing watching all this silently, now speak together in an undertone, yet distinctly. The Cratchit family talk in a still lower tone, so that only the murmur of their voices is heard.*

SCROOGE

Spirit, tell me if Tiny Tim will live.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

I see a vacant seat in the poor chimney corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die.

SCROOGE

No, no; oh, no, kind Spirit! say he will be spared.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. [*Scrooge hangs his head in shame.*] Man, if man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered what the surplus is, and where it is. Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child. O God! to hear the Insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust!

[*Scrooge bends before the Ghost's rebuke, but soon looks up on hearing his own name.*

BOB CRATCHIT

Mr. Scrooge! I'll give you Mr. Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!

MRS. CRATCHIT

[*Angrily*] The Founder of the Feast indeed! I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it.

BOB CRATCHIT

My dear, the children! Christmas Day!

MRS. CRATCHIT

It should be Christmas Day, I am sure, on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is, Robert! Nobody knows it better than you do, poor fellow.

BOB CRATCHIT

My dear, Christmas Day.

MRS. CRATCHIT

I'll drink his health for your sake and the Day's, not for his. Long life to him! A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! He'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!

[*The children drink the toast after her, but without any mirth or heartiness. The mention of Scrooge's name casts a shadow over the party, which remains for some minutes; then they become as merry as before.*

BOB CRATCHIT

I've a situation in my eye for Peter, which is worth full five-and-sixpence weekly.

[*The children laugh and poke Peter in the ribs. He struts about, looking very important.*

MARTHA

I mean to lie abed to-morrow morning for a good long rest. Ah, but it 's good to have a holiday!

MRS. CRATCHIT

You have long days in the shop, I suppose.

MARTHA

Yes, mother; we work early and late. But I 'm thankful for the work. There 's many a girl would be glad of my place. I saw a countess and a lord the other day, and the lord was much about as tall as Peter.

[*Peter pulls up his collar till he is almost extinguished and straightens up with swelling chest, as he stands with his hands in his pockets. The Boy and Girl laugh noisily.*

MRS. CRATCHIT

Now, children, go to bed this blessed minute. Here is Christmas Day coming to-morrow, and you 'll be as cross as cross, if you don't get your sleep. I know Martha 's tired.

[*Mrs. Cratchit goes out with the Boy and Girl. Martha follows with Tiny Tim, all bidding their father good-night. Scrooge looks intently at Tiny Tim.*

BOB CRATCHIT

[*Rising*] Perhaps we might do worse than say good-night all round. [*To Belinda*] Good-night, Belinda. [*To Peter*] Good-night, Peter.

[*The three go off in a chorus of good-nights, leaving Scrooge and Christmas Present alone.*

SCROOGE

Have you other sights for me, Spirit?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT

One more. Follow me.

[*They go out, Scrooge holding fast to the robe of Christmas Present.*

SCENE III

The home of SCROOGE'S NEPHEW. He and his wife and a dozen guests, including TOPPER, are at the table. They are finishing dinner; the dessert is on the table. SCROOGE'S NEPHEW is laughing immoderately, holding his sides. The others laugh with him.

SCROOGE *and* CHRISTMAS PRESENT *enter and stand apart.*

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live! He believed it too!

NEPHEW'S WIFE

More shame for him, Fred!

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

He 's a comical old fellow — that 's the truth; and not so pleasant as he might be. However, his offenses carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him.

NEPHEW'S WIFE

I'm sure he is very rich, Fred; at least you always tell *me* so.

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

What of that, my dear! His wealth is of no use to him. He does n't do any good with it. He does n't make himself

comfortable with it. He has n't the satisfaction of thinking that he is ever going to benefit us with it.

NEPHEW'S WIFE

I have no patience with him.

WIFE'S SISTER

Nor I.

OTHER LADIES

Nor I.

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

Oh, I have! I am sorry for him; I could n't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims? He himself, always. He takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come and dine with us. What 's the consequence? He does n't lose much of a dinner.

NEPHEW'S WIFE

Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Indeed he does.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

There 's no doubt about that.

FIRST LADY

No, indeed.

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

Well! I 'm very glad to hear it, because I have n't great faith in these young housekeepers. What do *you* say, Topper?

TOPPER

I say that a bachelor is a wretched outcast, who has no right to express an opinion on the subject.

NEPHEW'S WIFE

[*To husband*] Go on, Fred. [*To guests*] He never finishes what he begins to say! He is such a ridiculous fellow!

[*Scrooge's Nephew bursts out laughing again, and the others join in the laughter.*

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

I was going to say that the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us, is, as I think, that he loses some pleasant moments, which could do him no harm. I am sure he loses pleasanter companions than he can find in his own thoughts, either in his moldy old office, or his dusty chambers. I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him. He may rail at Christmas till he dies, but he can't help thinking better of it — I defy him — if he finds me going there, in good temper, year after year, and saying, "Uncle Scrooge, how are you?" If it only puts him in the vein to leave his poor clerk fifty pounds, *that's* something; and I think I shook him yesterday.

[*All laugh heartily. They have a short game of Blindman's Buff, which Scrooge watches with interest.*

NEPHEW'S WIFE

Now let 's play Yes and No. You must think of something, Fred, and we 'll guess.

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

I have it. Begin.

FIRST LADY

Is it animal?

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

Yes.

SECOND LADY

Is it alive?

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

Yes.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Is it an agreeable animal?

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

No.

THIRD LADY

Is it disagreeable?

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

[*Laughing*] Yes.

NEPHEW'S WIFE

Is it savage?

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

[*Much amused*] Yes.

SECOND GENTLEMAN

Does it growl?

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

Yes.

FIRST LADY

Is it in a show?

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

No.

THIRD GENTLEMAN

Is it killed for the market?

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

[*Laughing heartily*] No.

NEPHEW'S WIFE

Does it live in London?

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

Yes.

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Is it a pig?

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

No.

TOPPER

Is it a bear?

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

No.

NEPHEW'S WIFE

I 've guessed it! I know what it is, Fred.

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

What is it?

NEPHEW'S WIFE

It 's your Uncle Scro-o-o-o-oge!

THIRD LADY

Did you tell the truth when you said it was n't a bear?

[*All laugh.*

SCROOGE'S NEPHEW

A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is. He would n't take it from me, but he may have it nevertheless. A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to Uncle Scrooge!

[*Scrooge forgets that he is invisible. He smiles, and makes a courteous gesture of acknowledgment. Scrooge and Christmas Present go out together.*

ACT IV

SCENE I

SCROOGE is standing alone in the street. He looks about him for the GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT, but does not see it. A bell strikes twelve. As the last stroke dies away he remembers the prediction of old JACOB MARLEY and, lifting up his eyes, beholds a solemn phantom draped and hooded, coming like a mist along the ground toward him.

Enter the GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME. *The* Spirit *is entirely concealed in a black mantle, save for one outstretched hand. As it comes slowly toward him,* SCROOGE *kneels.*

SCROOGE

I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come! [*The Spirit points onward with its hand.*] You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us. Is that true, Spirit? [*The Spirit bows its veiled head.*] Ghost of the Future! I fear you more than any specter I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me? [*The Spirit stands motionless, with hand still pointing onward.*] Lead on! lead on! the night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know. Lead on, Spirit, and I will follow.

[*The Spirit passes slowly from the room as it has come, with outstretched hand still pointing onward. Scrooge follows closely in the shadow of its dress, as if seeking protection.*

SCENE II

A street in London, in the business part of the city. Men pass to and fro. A number of men are standing together, talking.

Enter SCROOGE *and* CHRISTMAS FUTURE.

FIRST MERCHANT

No, I don't know much about it, either way. I only know he 's dead.

SECOND MERCHANT

When did he die?

THIRD MERCHANT

Why, what was the matter with him? I thought he 'd never die.

FIRST MERCHANT

[*Yawning*] I'm sure I don't know.

FOURTH MERCHANT

What has he done with his money?

FIRST MERCHANT

[*Yawning*] I have n't heard. Left it to his company, perhaps. He has n't left it to *me*. That 's all I know. [*General laughter.*] It 's likely to be a very cheap funeral, for upon my life I don't know of anybody to go to it. Suppose we make up a party and volunteer.

FOURTH MERCHANT

I don't mind going if a lunch is provided; but I must be fed, if I make one. [*Laughter.*

FIRST MERCHANT

Well, I am the most disinterested among you, after all; for I never wear black gloves, and I never eat lunch. But I 'll offer to go, if anybody else will. When I come to think of it, I 'm not at all sure that I was n't his most particular friend, for we used to stop and speak whenever we met. Bye, bye!

[*The men move away. The Ghost leads Scrooge to two persons who meet in the street and stop to speak to each other. They are wealthy business men, well known to Scrooge.*

FIRST MAN

How are you?

SECOND MAN

How are you?

FIRST MAN

Well! Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?

SECOND MAN

So I am told. Cold, is n't it?

FIRST MAN

Seasonable for Christmas time. You 're not a skater, I suppose?

SECOND MAN

No, no. Something else to think of. Good morning!

[*They bow and separate. Scrooge looks inquiringly at the Spirit.*

SCROOGE

Why do you bring me here to listen to these trivial conversations? They cannot refer to Jacob Marley, my partner,

for he died years ago, and your province is the future. Tell me the name of the man they were speaking of, the man who has just died. Do I know him?

[*The Spirit points onward, and they go out together.*

SCENE III

A miserable shop, in which refuse of all sorts is bought. Scraps of old iron are piled upon the floor, with heaps of rags and bottles. An old man with a villainous face sits by a charcoal stove, smoking.

SCROOGE *enters with the* PHANTOM, *and they stand apart. A* Charwoman *comes in with a heavy bundle. Immediately a* Laundress *comes in with a similar parcel. She is closely followed by a* Man *in faded black. Each of the three seems startled at meeting the others. They look at one another blankly for a moment, then all burst into a laugh, in which the old man joins.*

CHARWOMAN

Let the charwoman alone to be the first! Let the laundress alone to be the second; and let the undertaker's man alone to be the third. Look here, old Joe, here 's a chance! If we have n't all three met here without meaning it!

JOE

You could n't have met in a better place. Stop till I shut the door of the shop. Ah! how it skreeks! There ain't such a rusty bit of metal in the place as its own hinges, I believe; and I'm sure there 's no such old bones here

as mine. Ha, ha! we 're all suitable to our calling; we 're well matched.

[*The Charwoman throws her bundle on the floor and sits down with a defiant manner on a stool. She looks boldly at the other two.*

CHARWOMAN

What odds then! What odds! Every person has a right to take of themselves. *He* always did.

LAUNDRESS

That 's true, indeed! No man more so.

CHARWOMAN

Why then, don't stand staring as if you was afraid, woman; who 's the wiser? We 're not going to pick holes in each other's coats, I suppose?

LAUNDRESS

No, indeed!

MAN

We should hope not.

CHARWOMAN

Very well, then! That 's enough. Who 's the worse for the loss of a few things like these? If he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, wicked old miser, why was n't he natural in his lifetime? If he had been, he 'd have had somebody to look after him when he was struck by Death, instead of lying there alone by himself.

LAUNDRESS

It 's the truest word that ever was spoke. It 's a judgment on him.

CHARWOMAN

I wish it was a little heavier judgment; and it should have been, you may depend upon it, if I could have laid my hands on anything else. Open that bundle, old Joe, and let me know the value of it. Speak out plain. I 'm not afraid to be the first, nor afraid for them to see it. We knew pretty well that we were helping ourselves, before we met here, I believe. It 's no sin. Open the bundle, Joe.

MAN

No, look at mine first, Joe.

JOE

[*Examining the articles which the Man has given him*] You went for the jewelry, did n't you? Trust you for that! Seals, a pencil case, sleeve buttons, a brooch. Nothing very valuable. Is that all?

MAN

That 's all.

JOE

[*Writing figures on a paper and handing it to the Man*] That 's your account, and I would n't give another sixpence. Who 's next?

LAUNDRESS

[*Giving her parcel to Joe*] Here 's mine, Joe.

JOE

[*Opening the parcel*] Sheets and towels, two old silver teaspoons, a pair of sugar tongs, — old boots. [*Adds the items and hands a paper to the Laundress*] I always give too much to ladies. It 's a weakness of mine, and that 's the way I ruin

myself. That 's your account. If you asked me for another penny and made it an open question, I 'd repent of being so liberal, and knock off half a crown.

CHARWOMAN

And now undo *my* bundle, Joe.

[*Joe kneels to open the large bundle and, having unfastened many knots, drags forth a large and heavy roll of dark stuff.*

JOE

What do you call this? Bed curtains?

CHARWOMAN

Ah! Bed curtains — blankets too!

[*Laughs and leans forward on her crossed arms.*

JOE

You were born to make your fortune, and you 'll certainly do it.

CHARWOMAN

I certainly sha'n't hold my hand when I can get anything in it by reaching it out, for the sake of such a man as he was, I promise you, Joe. [*Joe writes the Charwoman's account and gives her the paper, then takes a flannel bag containing money and counts out the several amounts on the floor.*] Ah! this is the end of it, you see! He frightened every one away from him when he was alive, to profit us at last.

SCROOGE

[*Recoiling in horror*] Spirit! I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way, now. Take me hence, I beseech you.

[*Scrooge follows the Phantom out.*

SCENE IV

SCROOGE and the PHANTOM are standing in a home darkened by the shadow of debt to a hard creditor, the man who has just died. A woman sits sewing; children are playing in the room. The mother lays down her work, looks at the clock, and walks up and down the room, as if eagerly expecting some one. A knock is heard, and she hurries to the door.

Enter the Husband, *a young man with a careworn face and a remarkable expression, as of a delight which he struggles to repress, from shame.*

WIFE

What news to-day? [*Pause.*] Is it good or bad?

HUSBAND

[*Sitting down by the table and leaning his head on his hand*] Bad.

WIFE

We are quite ruined?

HUSBAND

No. There is hope yet, Caroline.

WIFE

If *he* relents, there is! Nothing is past hope, if such a miracle has happened.

HUSBAND

He is past relenting. He is dead.

WIFE

[*Her patient face lightens, and she clasps her hands*] I am thankful to hear it. — Heaven forgive me! What am I saying? I would not rejoice at the death of any human being. But how can I help it? He was a hard man to us. He had no pity.

HUSBAND

What the half-drunken woman whom I told you of last night said to me, when I tried to see him and obtain a week's delay, and what I thought was a mere excuse to avoid me, turns out to have been quite true. He was not only very ill, but dying, then.

WIFE

To whom will our debt be transferred?

HUSBAND

I don't know. But before that time, we shall be ready with the money; and even though we were not, it would be bad fortune indeed to find so merciless a creditor in his successor. We may sleep to-night with lighter hearts, Caroline!

[*The Children, who have drawn near to listen, cling to their father and mother, with smiling, happy faces. All look relieved and cheerful.*

SCROOGE

Spirit, let me see some tenderness connected with a death; or the scenes which we witnessed just now will be forever present to me.

[*The Phantom and Scrooge go out together, the Phantom pointing onward as before.*

SCENE V

BOB CRATCHIT'S home. TINY TIM has died. It is evening. The mother and daughters are sewing on black garments, by candlelight. The two little CRATCHITS sit motionless in a corner, looking at PETER, who sits at the table with a book before him.

SCROOGE *and* CHRISTMAS FUTURE *enter unobserved by the others.*

MRS. CRATCHIT

[*Laying her work upon the table, and putting her hand to her face*] The color hurts my eyes. [*Wipes her eyes*] They 're better now. It makes them weak to work by candlelight, and I would n't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, for the world. It must be near his time.

PETER

[*Closing his book*] Past it, rather. But I think he has walked a little slower than he used, these last few evenings, mother.

MRS. CRATCHIT

[*In a cheerful voice, which falters only once*] I have known him walk with — I have known him walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder, very fast indeed.

PETER

And so have I, often.

BELINDA

And so have I.

MRS. CRATCHIT

But he was very light to carry, and his father loved him so, that it was no trouble; no trouble. — And there is your father at the door!

Enter BOB CRATCHIT. MRS. CRATCHIT *hastens to meet him. He sits down at the table, and the different members of the family bring his tea with affectionate zeal. The two children get upon his knees, and lay their faces against his, comfortingly.* BOB *puts his arms about them.*

BOB CRATCHIT

Are n't these good children to-night, mother?

MRS. CRATCHIT

Yes, they 've been good all day. But come away now, children, and let your father eat. I 'm sure he 's famished.

[*The children get down, and Bob sits at the table, eating.*

BOB CRATCHIT

You and the girls are working fast, mother. You 'll be done long before Sunday.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Yes. You went to the churchyard to-day, Robert?

BOB CRATCHIT

Yes, my dear. I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you 'll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. — My little child!

[*Puts his hand over his eyes and hastens from the room. Mrs. Cratchit wipes her eyes.*

MRS. CRATCHIT

You 're almost done, Martha, are n't you?

MARTHA

Yes, mother, almost.

MRS. CRATCHIT

You 're very swift with your needle.

[*Rises and goes to Belinda, to examine and praise her work.*

Enter BOB CRATCHIT.

BOB CRATCHIT

[*Cheerfully*] Do you know, I met Mr. Scrooge's nephew to-day, and his kindness was most extraordinary.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Tell us about it, Robert.

BOB CRATCHIT

I suppose he saw that I looked a little — just a little down, you know; and so he asked what had happened to distress me. On which I told him, for he is the pleasantest spoken gentleman you ever heard. "I am heartily sorry for it, Mr. Cratchit," he said, "and heartily sorry for your good wife." By the bye, how he ever knew *that*, I don't know.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Knew what, my dear?

BOB CRATCHIT

Why, that you are a good wife.

PETER

Everybody knows that!

BOB CRATCHIT

Very well observed, my boy! I hope so. "Heartily sorry," he said, "for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way," he said, giving me his card, "that 's where I live. Pray come to me." Now, it was n't for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind way, that this was quite delightful. It really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim, and felt with us.

MRS. CRATCHIT

I 'm sure he 's a good soul!

BOB CRATCHIT

You would be surer of it, my dear, if you saw and spoke to him. I should n't be at all surprised — mark what I say! — if he got Peter a better situation.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Only hear that, Peter!

BELINDA

And then Peter will be keeping company with some one, and setting up for himself.

PETER

[*Grinning*] Get along with you!

BOB CRATCHIT

It 's just as likely as not, one of these days; though there 's plenty of time for that, my dear. But however and whenever we part from one another, I am sure we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim — shall we — or this first parting that there was among us?

ALL

Never, father!

BOB CRATCHIT

And I know, my dears, that when we recollect how patient and how mild he was, although he was a little child, we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves and forget poor Tiny Tim in doing it.

MARTHA

No, father!

PETER

We never will.

BELINDA

Never.

BOB CRATCHIT

I am very happy — very happy.

[*Mrs. Cratchit goes and stands by her husband. Martha and Belinda caress him. The children kiss and cling to him. Peter shakes hands with his father. They talk together while Scrooge speaks.*

SCROOGE

Specter, answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be, only? Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead. But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me. — You do not answer. Something informs me that our parting moment is near at hand. I know it, but I know not how. [*The Phantom points onward with its extended hand.*] Tell me, I pray, what man that was, whose death brought mirth and happiness to some, regret to none; who died a miserable death, ministered to by no kindly hand,

a prey to thieves ere the breath had left his body. [*The Spirit points directly at Scrooge, who falls upon his knees.*] Am I that man? No, Spirit! Oh, no, no! [*Seizes the Spirit's robe*] Spirit! hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope? [*The outstretched hand wavers.*] Good Spirit, your nature intercedes for me and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life! — I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Only tell me that I may change the dark pictures you have shown!

[*As he lifts his hands imploringly, the Phantom vanishes. The Cratchit family have disappeared, and Scrooge is left alone.*

ACT V

SCENE I

Christmas morning. SCROOGE, in dressing gown and cap, is lying on the sofa in his own room. He wakes gradually, and realizes that the visits of the Spirits have been but the dreams of a single night.

SCROOGE

Surely this is my room. This is the sofa I went to sleep on last night. — It was all a dream! My life is still my own, and the years in which to make amends are still mine. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future! The Spirits of all Three shall lead me hereafter. [*Kneeling*] Oh, Jacob

Marley! Heaven and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob, on my knees! [*Rises and walks about*] I don't know what to do! I am as light as a feather; I am as happy as an angel; I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A Merry Christmas to everybody! A Happy New Year to all the world! Halloo here! Whoop! Halloo!

There 's the door, by which the Ghost of Jacob Marley entered! There 's the corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present stood. It 's all right; it 's all true; it all happened. [*Pause.*] I don't know what day of the month it is! I don't know how long I 've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. I 'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I 'd rather be a baby. [*Goes to the door and calls*] Halloo! Halloo here!

A Boy *enters.*

What 's to-day?

BOY

[*In great surprise*] Eh?

SCROOGE

What 's to-day, my fine fellow?

BOY

To-day! Why, CHRISTMAS DAY.

SCROOGE

[*To himself*] It 's Christmas Day! I have n't missed it. — Halloo, my fine fellow!

BOY

Halloo!

SCROOGE

Do you know the poulterer's, in the next street but one, at the corner?

BOY

I should hope I did.

SCROOGE

An intelligent boy! A remarkable boy! Do you know whether they 've sold the prize turkey that was hanging up there? Not the little prize turkey — the big one?

BOY

What, the one as big as me?

SCROOGE

What a delightful boy! It 's a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck!

BOY

It 's hanging there now.

SCROOGE

Is it? Go and buy it. Tell them to charge it to Ebenezer Scrooge, and send it to this address. [*Steps to the table and writes*] Here 's half a crown for you. Mind you make haste. [*The Boy rushes out. Scrooge rubs his hands in glee.*] I 'll send it to Bob Cratchit! He sha'n't know who sends it. It 's twice the size of Tiny Tim. [*Goes to the door, and looks out*] No, upon my word! What good luck! [*Calling outside*] Would you be so kind as to step this way?

The two Benevolent Gentlemen *enter.*

[*Shaking hands with them most cordially*] How do you do? How do you do? Glad to see you. I hope you succeeded

yesterday. It was very kind of you. A Merry Christmas to you both!

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Mr. Scrooge?

SCROOGE

Yes. That is my name, and I fear it may not be pleasant to you. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness — [*Whispers in the Gentleman's ear.*

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Bless me! My dear Mr. Scrooge, are you serious?

SCROOGE

If you please. Not a farthing less. A great many back payments are included in it, I assure you. Will you do me that favor?

FIRST GENTLEMAN

My dear sir, I don't know what to say to such munifi—

SCROOGE

Don't say anything, please. Come to see me. Will you come to see me, both of you?

FIRST GENTLEMAN

I will!

SECOND GENTLEMAN

I will, most certainly.

SCROOGE

Thank 'ee. I am much obliged to you. I thank you fifty times. Bless you! [*The Benevolent Gentlemen go out.*] And now to give Fred and his wife a surprise. I'll eat Christmas dinner with them. I'll laugh at all the jokes and play all the games. I will. I'll do it. [*Goes out.*

SCENE II

SCROOGE'S office. The morning of December twenty-sixth.

SCROOGE *comes in, hangs his coat and hat on a nail, and sits down at his desk.*

SCROOGE

I'm early this morning. I thought I should get here first. I meant to do it. I meant to catch Bob Cratchit coming late the morning after Christmas. — Did n't I surprise Fred last night? I thought he 'd shake my arm off. He was glad to see me, and no mistake. How natural they all looked! Just as they did in my dream, exactly. Wonderful party, wonderful games! [*Looks at his watch and walks about*] Quarter-past nine. I'll make him open his eyes, or my name is n't Ebenezer Scrooge! I'll give him a surprise such as he never had before.

BOB CRATCHIT *enters with comforter and hat in hand. He climbs on his stool immediately and begins writing at a furious pace.*

SCROOGE

[*Feigning savage ill temper*] Halloo! What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?

BOB CRATCHIT

I am very sorry, sir. I *am* behind my time.

SCROOGE

You are? Yes, I think you are. You are full eighteen minutes and a half behind your time. Step this way, sir, if you please.

BOB CRATCHIT

[*Approaching Scrooge*] It 's only once a year, sir. It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir.

SCROOGE

Now, I 'll tell you what, my friend. I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore I am about to raise your salary! [*Jumps from his stool and gives Bob a sportive poke in the ribs. Bob staggers back and seizes a ruler as if to defend himself. Scrooge claps Bob on the back good-naturedly*] A merry Christmas, Bob! A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year! I 'll raise your salary, and endeavor to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon. Make up the fire, and buy another coal scuttle before you dot another *i*, Bob Cratchit! [*Bob stands a moment as if dazed, then wrings Scrooge's hand and, seizing cap and comforter, dashes out.*] He does n't half believe I mean it, but I do. I 'll look after Martha and Peter and all the rest of them, and I 'll be a second father to Tiny Tim. I 'll try to be a good master and a good friend and a good man. I 've been living a good many years without any Christmas; now I 'll have it all Christmas. I 'm glad there 's time.

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